The
James F. Lincoln
Library

1856

Lake Erie College
Painesville, Ohio

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/josephvance0000will_k9e9

JOSEPH VANCE

An Ill-written Autobiography

BY

WILLIAM DE MORGAN

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1916

Copyright, 1906
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

Published July, 1906

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

DEDICATED TO
HORATIO LUCAS
IN TOKEN OF
A VERY OLD FRIENDSHIP
AND
AN UNFORGOTTEN TIME

14085

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

OF JOE VANCE'S FATHER AND HIS UNFORTUNATE HABITS. HOW HE QUARRELLED WITH A SWEEP WHO COULD BUTT; AND SUFFERED THEREBY. HOW JOE CONCEALED THIS CIRCUMSTANCE FROM HIS MOTHER. 1

CHAPTER II.

HOW JOE PREVARICATED. OF PORKY OWLS AND A SPORTING CARD. HOW JOE WAS A WITNESS; ALSO OF THE REV. MR. CAPSTICK AND OF MR. VANCE AS A CONTROVERSIALIST. HOW JOE VISITED HIS FATHER IN THE HOSPITAL. 13

CHAPTER III.

OF JOE'S FATHER'S CONVALESCENCE, AND OF HIS CONNECTION WITH A BENEFIT CLUB. OF JOE'S EIGHTH BIRTHDAY, AND OF HOW A VERY LITTLE MAN SOLD HIS FATHER A SIGNBOARD. . . . 22

CHAPTER IV.

A SHORT CHAPTER, BUT THEN IT IS THE THIN END OF A BIG WEDGE. FOR IT TELLS HOW MR. VANCE GOT HIS FIRST BUILDING JOB. . 30

CHAPTER V.

OF JOE'S VERY FIRST VISIT TO POPLAR VILLA. OF ITS DRAINS AND THEIR STENCH. OF HOW JOE SAW HIS FIRST REAL YOUNG LADY AT HOME. HOW SHE KISSED JOE, AND JOE LIKED IT. OF A PEAR TREE THAT LIVED THENCEFORWARD IN JOE'S MEMORY. OF HIS RETURN HOME. 35

CHAPTER VI.

SHOWS HOW MR. VANCE OBTAINED CAPITAL AND PLANT. ALSO HOW HE CREATED CONFIDENCE. 46

CHAPTER VII.

CONCERNING A BARREL-DRAIN WHICH DID NOT EXIST, OF REPAIRS TO THE NURSERY CHIMNEY AND HOW JOE WENT UP IT. ALSO WHAT A GOOD WASHING HE HAD. 50

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE
HOW JOEY HAD MISS LOSSIE'S ARM ROUND HIM WHILE HE SAW BOOKS. MISS VIOLET CORRECTS HER SISTER. MISS LOSSIE'S TONGUE. HOW JOE WENT HOME AND HEARD FROM PORKY OF THE BEAK. HOW MR. VANCE HAS ANOTHER JOB, ALL DUE TO THE MAGIC BOARD. 55

CHAPTER IX.

HOW JOEY PAID ANOTHER VISIT TO POPLAR VILLA, AND HOW HE SHOCKED MISS VIOLET. HOW HE WENT UP INTO THE LIBRARY AND SAT ON DR. THORPE'S KNEE AND DID EUCLID. HOW HE WEPT ABOUT MISS LOSSIE. HOW DR. T. OFFERED HIM AN EDUCATION. AND OF THE SAD COLLAPSE OF PETER GUNN, TESTE PORKY OWLS. 63

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT JOE NOW, AS HE WRITES, AND ABOUT SOME OLD, OLD LETTERS OF LOSSIE'S. SOME MORALIZING YOU MAY SKIP. HOW LOSSIE WENT TO THE SEASIDE. PORKY OWLS'S OBSCURANTISM—SOMEWHAT OF MISS VIOLET'S GRANDES PASSIONS. 70

CHAPTER XI.

A VERY SHORT CHAPTER ABOUT HOW JOEY WENT TO MR. PENGUIN'S SEMINARY, OR ACADEMY. NEVERTHELESS IT TELLS HOW HE DID LATIN WITH LOSSIE'S ARM ROUND HIM. 89

CHAPTER XII.

MORE ABOUT PENGUIN'S. SOMEWHAT OF THE SACRED CULT OF GENTLEMAN. HOW JOE WAS PROMOTED TO A REAL PUBLIC SCHOOL, AND HIS IMPRESSIONS OF IT. 94

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW JOE RETURNED FROM ST. WITHOLD, BUT WAS AFFLICTED BY HIS HAT. BUT WAS RELIEVED. MORE OF HIS FATHER'S LEAPS UP IN LIFE. JOE'S RETICENCE. 100

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UN-ACADEMICAL SUNDAY MORNING. CONCERNING HIS FATHER'S NEW HOUSE. JOE'S WALK TO POPLAR VILLA, BUT NO MISS LOSSIE. HE TELLS HIS SCHOOL EXPERIENCES. ANTHROPOPHAGI. HE WILL FOLLOW LOSSIE, EVEN TO HAMPSTEAD. 105

CHAPTER XV.

HOW JOE WALKED AND 'BUSSED TO LOSSIE IN HAMPSTEAD. HOW A LITTLE GIRL TALKED TO HIM, WHO PREFERRED DROWNING TO HANGING. HOW LOSSIE LIT JOE'S HEART UP; AND OF THE SPENCER MÉNAGE. LOSSIE MAKES JOE TROT ST. WITHOLD OUT AT THE FIRS ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH. HOW GLAD JOE WAS HE HAD TOLD NO MORE ABOUT HIS SCHOOL NIGHTMARE. . . . 111

CHAPTER XVI.

PAGE

JOE'S FATHER'S HAT AGAIN. AND HOW HIS MOTHER DIED. A LETTER OF LOSSIE WRITTEN A YEAR AFTER. OF HIS FATHER'S GRIEF AND HIS OWN. THE STORY OF HIS FATHER'S COURTSHIP TOLD TO JOE—OF THE PURE CAIRN MAGORRACHAN MOUNTAIN DEW, AND HOW JOE LAY AWAKE BECAUSE OF THE SAME. 128

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INEXCUSABLY LONG LETTER OF MISS LOSSIE'S—IT TELLS HOW SHE ADVOCATED THE CAUSE OF TEMPERANCE MORE SUCCESSFULLY THAN POOR MR. CAPSTICK, WHOSE INTENTIONS WERE GOOD, BUT WHO WAS LACKING IN TACT. AND OF HOW MR. VANCE POURED THE CAIRN MAGORRACHAN MOUNTAIN DEW ON THE PARLOUR FIRE. 141

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TALE OF JOE'S PUGNACITY AT SCHOOL. OF HIS FATHER'S ABSTINENCE. MUCH ABOUT HIS NAMESAKE JOEY, WHICH WE WOULD OMIT IF WE COULD DO WITHOUT IT. OF THE RAPIDITY OF HIS FATHER'S RISE. OF HOW HE SAW NOLLY, BUT THE OTHER DAY, AND COULD NOT SPEAK WITH HIM. OF HOW LOSSIE IS STILL LIVING, IN ITALY. . 151

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW DR. THORPE VISITED JOE AT OXFORD, AND HOW THAT VISIT ENDED THE FIRST MOVEMENT OF JOE'S LIFE ON A DISCORD. OF HIS PAINFUL DOUBLE IDENTITY. 161

CHAPTER XX.

LETTERS OF LOSSIE, VERY IMPORTANT. GENERAL DESPREZ. HOW SHE TOLD ABOUT JOE—HOW THE GENERAL WANTED TO MARRY LOSSIE—FULL DETAILS OF ALL HE SAID, BUT NO STAGE DIRECTIONS. HOW JOE'S TRAGEDY BURST SUDDENLY ON LOSSIE, AND SHE ORDERED THE GENERAL TO THE RESCUE. 173

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW JOE AND HIS SELF LIVED IN GLOOM AT OXFORD AND WOULD NOT GO TO LONDON. HOW GENERAL DESPREZ CAME FOR THEM AND JOE KEPT HIS SELF IN CHECK. HOW LOSSIE MET THEM ALL AT PADDINGTON. 188

CHAPTER XXII.

LOSSIE'S FAREWELL INJUNCTIONS TO JOE. HIS NAMESAKE IS NOT A SOURCE OF SATISFACTION. A JOLLY WEDDING, AND THE CROAKING AFTER. LOSSIE'S SEND-OFF. POOR JOE! 193

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW CHRISTOPHER VANCE & CO.'S MR. MACFARREN GAVE NO SATISFACTION. AND HOW A SUBSTITUTE WAS FOUND FOR HIM. TO DR. THORPE FOR CONSOLATION. OF AN EMPTY WHISKEY BOTTLE. . 199

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAGE
JOE'S DUPLEX GEAR DISCOMFORTS HIM. JUSTICE TO PINDAR. HOW JOE WENT TO LYNMOUTH WITH A READING PARTY, AND INVITED MASTER JOSEPH THORPE. THE LATTER GOES UNDER A SEA-ROCK. JOE AFTER HIM. HOW A LIFE WAS SAVED FOR ONE WHO COULD NOT USE IT FOR GOOD. 205

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW JOE WOULD HAVE TAKEN A BETTER DEGREE BUT FOR CHESS. HOW HE PATENTED HIS SPHERICAL ENGINE. HIS DIFFICULTIES WITH THE BRITISH ENGINEER. OF HOW HE IS CHEATED AND HIS FATHER COMES TO THE RESCUE. 211

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FERRET IS BIBULOUS. HOW JOE WENT TO PLAY CROQUET WITH HIS DAUGHTER. OF HER GLORIOUS BEAUTY AND ITS EFFECT ON ONE OF JOE'S INDIVIDUALITIES. HE TALKS TO A FLAT JANE. OF A GUST OF ABBOT ANSELM, AND JOE'S MEETING WITH AN OLD FOE, WHO IS FIANCÉ TO THE FERRET'S DAUGHTER. JANE IS SOMEBODY TOO. HE GOES HOME LINKED WITH HIS FOE. . . 217

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW JOE'S FATHER HAD BEEN MATCHMAKING, AND HOW HE EXCEEDED HIS ALLOWANCE. HOW GOOD A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WOULD BE FOR HIM. JOE IS NOT IN LOVE WITH THE FLAT JANE. HOW HE WROTE WHO SHE WAS TO LOSSIE; A FOOLISH LETTER. OF THE SPHERICAL ENGINE. HOW HE MET FLAT JANE AGAIN AT THE FERRET'S. AND GOT DANGEROUSLY CONFIDENTIAL. . . . 226

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOE HEARS FROM FLAT JANE. HOW HIS FATHER SMELT A RAT. HOW JOE SPENT AN EVENING AT FLAT JANE'S FATHER'S, AND TOOK A BOOK TO HER LATER. OF THE OLD LIBRARY. JANE GETS AT JOE. BUT SHE IS VERY NICE. SHE CLEARS JOE'S MIND UP GREATLY. JOE IS A FOOL—WHY NOT BE FRIENDS? HE TALKS WITH DR. THORPE, WHO RATHER LOVES JANE BY REPORT. JOE PERHAPS LOVES HER TOO, AND IS A FOOL AGAIN. 238

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW TWO FIANCÉS READ MRS. LUCILLA DESPREZ'S ANSWER TO JOE'S LETTER. OF PERTURBATION THEREAT. OF HOW JOE'S FATHER FOUND AND READ IT TOO. HE WILL NOT BE AN ENCUMBRANCE. OF ANOTHER LETTER FROM JANE. JOE IS BROKEN QUITE OFF. . 249

CHAPTER XXX.

JOE COULD BEAR TO LOSE JANEY. OF THE SPHERICAL ENGINE AND HIS NEW PROVISIONAL. AND PRING. HOW JOE'S FATHER WILL BUILD HIM AN ENGINEERING WORKSHOP. THE MACALLISTER

PAGE

REPEATER, AND JOE'S PARTNERSHIP WITH BONY. MRS. BONY'S BABY. MR. BONY ON ENGAGEMENTS, AND HOW HE DID IT. OF A CONFESSION OF PHEENER'S. AND HOW OLD VANCE GOT VERY DRUNK. EHEU! JOE GOES TO SEEK SOLACE FROM DR. THORPE. 258

CHAPTER XXXI.

BUT DR. THORPE WAS IN TROUBLE HIMSELF, FOR THAT BEPPINO IS IN DISGRACE. NOLLY'S OPINION ABOUT BEPPINO'S FRIENDS. HOW BEPPINO WAS THRASHED. A PASSIONATE ADMIRATION. BEP REALLY VAIN OF IT. HOW JOE WAS UNFEELING TO HIM. HOW PHEENER TOOK AWAY THE BOTTLE. 270

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW JOE MET JANEY AGAIN. HE IS LEFT ALONE WITH HER AND FEELS QUEER. HOW HE WILL WRITE IT ALL TO LOSSIE. MATCH-MAKING JEANNIE. THEY ARE ALONE SOME MORE. A RAPPROCHEMENT ON BONY-JEANNIE LINES. HOW JOE'S WALK HOME WAS HAPPY. 285

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BUT HE DIDN'T WRITE THE LETTER TO LOSSIE. MR. VANCE'S DISGUST AT THE RECRUDESCENCE OF THE WIDOW. HOW HE TOLD DR. THORPE, AND THERE WAS SOMETHING AFTER ALL! BUT JEANNIE WILL PROVIDE FOR NOLLY. JOE'S WANT OF LITERARY SKILL JERKS HIS TALE OUT OF GEAR. 296

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AND, AFTER ALL, LOSSIE'S LETTER PASSED HER IN MID-OCEAN! OF HOW JOE AND JANEY READ HIS FATHER'S LETTER AT POPLAR VILLA, AND HOW LOSSIE CAME UNEXPECTEDLY ON TWO HAPPY LOVERS IN THE TWILIGHT. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ELDEST MISS FLOWERDEW! DR. THORPE JOINS THEM; BUT HOW ABOUT HIS HEART? HOW JOE AND JANEY WERE MARRIED. BUT NO ONE CAN PLAY JANEY'S PIANO NOW. 306

CHAPTER XXXV.

OF THE NEW FACTORY IN CHELSEA. OF THE BACKSLIDING OF OLD MR. VANCE. HOW JOE DREAMED A STRANGE DREAM, AND ITS INTERRUPTION. OF THE GREAT FIRE, AND HOW MR. VANCE WAS RESCUED. BUT SPRAINED. SO FAR AS CAN BE ASCERTAINED, FULLY COVERED BY INSURANCE. AN OLD BURNED BOARD, WITH WRITING ON IT. 317

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF A BRAIN-WAVE THAT WENT TO INDIA. AND OF AN OPTICAL DELUSION. HOW JOE TOOK THE NEWS TO DR. THORPE, AND BEPPINO WAS A BORE. AUNT IZZY TOO DEAF FOR ANYTHING. DR. THORPE AND JOE WALK TO CHELSEA. 335

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PAGE

A CONFERENCE AND A GROWING ALARM. HOW THE WHISKEY-BOTTLE HAD CAUSE TO CHUCKLE. THE CHEQUE BOOKS DID IT, OF COURSE—WANTED THIRTY-THOUSAND POUNDS. ALSO HOW A BANK SMASHED—AND HOW A BIG BAD DEBTOR OWED A BIG BAD DEBT. CHRISTOPHER VANCE & CO. INSOLVENT. 344

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JOE'S FATHER DOES NOT IMPROVE MUCH. BUT HE IS HIS OLD SELF STILL, AND ENJOYS A SURPRISE HE HAS TREASURED FOR HIS FAMILY. HOW HE HAD BOUGHT A TRINKET IN BOND STREET. THE NEW LIMITED CO. IT STARTS ILL; BUT GOOD FORTUNE BRINGS BACK AN OLD BOARD TO HELP THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS. 353

CHAPTER XXXIX.

JOE'S FATHER SLIPS DOWNHILL. PETER GUNN CROPS UP. AND AT LAST OLD VANCE KNOWS THE STORY OF THE BOTTLE-END. HE REACHES THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL, AND GOES ELSEWHERE. BUT THE BOARD IS STRONG AND PHEENER IS DESERVEDLY RICH, AND ALL IS WELL. SO JOE HAS TIME FOR REMINISCENCE, AND REMEMBERS HOW HE MET PORKY OWLS AGAIN, AND DIDN'T KNOW HIM. 360

CHAPTER XL.

THIS CHAPTER IS REALLY ALL DEVOTED TO DR. THORPE'S OPINIONS, ALTHOUGH IT PRETENDS NOT AT THE BEGINNING. BETTER SKIP THEM. A QUOTATION FROM TENNYSON. JANEY AND JOE MAKE EACH A PROMISE TO THE OTHER. 367

CHAPTER XLI.

A CHAPTER THAT HAD TO BE WRITTEN. 382

CHAPTER XLII.

JOE IS A WIDOWER. A TENANTLESS OLD HOUSE. HOW HE WENT TO DR. THORPE; AND OF A CHILD THAT WAS SAVED ON THE WRECK. THE SYMPATHY OF BEPPINO. A GOOD IDEA! WHY NOT TAKE BEPPINO TO ITALY? 390

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOW JANEY'S PIANO WAS TO BE KEPT IN TUNE. FRAU SCHMIDT. THE WALDSTEIN SONATA. THE FRAU MISLEADS BEPPINO. WHO MISS SIBYL FULLER PERCEVAL WAS. THE GOLDEN BEAD IN THE HUMAN CRUCIBLE. THE KINCARDINESHIRE JOINT-STOCK BANK. HOW ABOUT THE DOCTOR'S HEART? . , ... 403

CHAPTER XLIV.

PAGE
BEPPINO AS A MARINER. PARIS AT PARIS. THE JOURNEY TO ITALY. IDOMENEO PELLEGRINI. BUT NO JANEY NOW. BEPPINO CARRIES OFF JOE'S TRUNK TO FLORENCE; WHEREOF THE ENGRAVED NAME CAUSES MUCH APPREHENSION. 415

CHAPTER XLV.

JOE'S RETURN HOME. MR. SPENCER AND COMTE. HIS BAD NEWS ABOUT DR. THORPE'S AFFAIRS. A FORGOTTEN TRUST FUND. THE DOCTOR BANKRUPT. LOSSIE'S RETURN FROM INDIA. . . 423

CHAPTER XLVI.

LOSSIE—SHE HAS NO PATIENCE WITH DR. THORPE'S VICTIM. BEPPINO AND MISS FULLER PERCEVAL. A MYSTERIOUS LETTER FROM FLORENCE. BEPPINO'S EXPLANATIONS. THE CENOTAPH IN PORTUGAL. JOE CARRIES THE TURK PAST THE DOCTOR'S LIBRARY DOOR. O GRAVE! WHERE IS THY VICTORY? . . 431

CHAPTER XLVII.

JOE'S ABSENCE FROM BEPPINO'S WEDDING. VULGARITY, BANALITY. ANOTHER LETTER FROM FLORENCE. JEANNIE DETECTS A FAINT SMELL OF A DEVIL. BUT BEPPINO GETS HIS LETTER. . . 441

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BEPPINO'S ILLNESS. LOSSIE STARTS FOR AVIGNON. A DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR'S FUNERAL. JOE MEETS NEWS OF YET ANOTHER DEATH ON HIS RETURN TO CHELSEA. HE HAS THROWN AWAY GOOD GRIEF ON BEPPINO. WHY DID BEPPINO WANT HIS CHILD CALLED CRISTOFORO? 448

CHAPTER XLIX.

JOE SUBSIDIZES CRISTOFORO. HOW HE TOOK GENERAL DESPREZ INTO HIS CONFIDENCE. THE BRAZILIAN SCHEME. ANOTHER FLORENTINE LETTER. HOW JOE RESOLVED TO GO OUT AND SEE THAT CRISTOFORO WAS PROPERLY NOURISHED. 458

CHAPTER L.

OE GOES TO FIESOLE. AND HEARS ALL ABOUT BEPPINO'S WILD OAT. HE GETS HIS LETTERS, AND ADOPTS HIS BABY. HIS MIXED TALE TO LOSSIE. HE IS WALKING ON A TIGHT-ROPE, BUT FOR LOSSIE'S SAKE 466

CHAPTER LI.

A LETTER FROM A MAN OF THE WORLD. THE GENERAL'S SATCHEL. JOE ARRANGES FOR HIS START TO BRAZIL. BUT HE GOES TO SEE CRISTOFORO AGAIN FIRST. HOW HE TOOK A WALK AT FIESOLE, WITHOUT JANEY. AND HOW HE HEARD THE WALDSTEIN SONATA ON THE TUSCAN HILLS. HOW CRISTOFORO TICKLED. . . 473

CHAPTER LII.

PAGE

HERR PFLEIDERER DISAPPROVES OF BRAZIL. HOW JOE, YEARS AFTER, WENT TO LOOK FOR POPLAR VILLA, AND GRASS THEN GREW WHERE TROY TOWN STOOD. HOW BEPPINO'S SECOND SON (OR THEREABOUTS) WAS BORN. THE NEED OF BROWNING. OF A VILLA FOR LOSSIE AT SORRENTO, NOT FLORENCE. HOW THE GENERAL NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE DOCTOR, MORE'S THE PITY! JOE'S LAST HAPPY EVENING IN ENGLAND. HOW HE CALLED ON AUNT IZZY. AND OF MR. SPENCER. NOLLY SEES JOE OFF AT EUSTON. THE SEA, ONCE MORE! 481

CHAPTER LIII.

WHAT JOE HAS BEEN DRIVING AT. HE HAS CRISTOFORO OUT TO HIM IN BRAZIL. HOW THE GENERAL DIED LIKE A HERO AT MAIWAND. LOSSIE GOES TO FLORENCE. A PLEASANT LETTER FROM HER AT VILLA MAGONCINI. ANOTHER, WITH A PLEASANT POSTSCRIPT. JOE TAKES A RIDE AND SHOOTS A HALF-BREED. ACCIDENT TO CRISTOFORO. JOE'S ANSWER TO THE LETTER. MORE CORRESPONDENCE, TERRIBLE TO JOE. ALL IS ENDED. "THIS IS FOR LOSSIE." 492

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TALE IS TOLD. A FEW RECOLLECTIONS OF FOLK SEEN IN LONDON. OF NOLLY, OF HICKMAN, OF PRING, OF LADY TOWERSTAIRS. AND OF POOR OLD CAPSTICK, IN A MADHOUSE! WHEN HE HAS LOOKED THROUGH THE LETTERS AGAIN, HE WILL BURN THE WHOLE LOT; BUT—! A LONG LETTER OF LOSSIE'S TO SARITA SPENCER. FINIS. 506

JOSEPH VANCE

JOSEPH VANCE

CHAPTER I

OF JOE VANCE'S FATHER AND HIS UNFORTUNATE HABITS. HOW HE QUARRELLED WITH A SWEEP WHO COULD BUTT; AND SUFFERED THEREBY. HOW JOE CONCEALED THIS CIRCUMSTANCE FROM HIS MOTHER.

My Father and Mother never could come to a clear understanding about what had disagreed with my Father the day he lost his situation at Fothergill's.

My Father thought it was the sausage and mashed potatoes he had for lunch at the Rose and Crown, at fourpence, and as much mustard and pepper as you liked. My Mother thought it was the beer.

There was something to be said for my Mother's view, on the score of quantity.

"Everything," she said, "I bring to figures, and my Aunt Elizabeth Hannah taught me to it." And sure enough figures did show that my Father, who had a shilling and threepence in his pocket when he left home at six-thirty in the morning, must have spent eightpence on beer, or lost some of it.—Because, if we allow a penny for the 'bus, and twopence for a 'arf an ounce of barker which he bought (I do not like to give his exact words) at a tobacconist's with a hæmorrhage on his way home, there's the price of two quarts of four ale left, put it how you may.—"And your Father always had a weak head," said my Mother in after years, in the many times over she told me the story.

Anyhow, something must have disagreed with him, or he wouldn't have called Mr. Wotherspoon, the head clerk at Fothergill's, an old herring-gut when he told him to put his trolley somewhere else, and not leave it stood in the orfice door.

"Of course it wasn't a civil remark, in the manner of speaking," said my Mother, "but your Father, my dear, was that simple and honourable himself he never had a suspicion of guile.—And well did Mr. Wotherspoon deserve the epithet if my belief is true (and I shall hold it to my dying day) that the old man only similated deafness all those years to one day catch your Father out. For I need 'ardly say to you, my dear, that the remark was a outside remark, as the sayin' is, and not intended to reach its audience."

If my recollection of my Father's conversation isn't coloured by subsequent experience of hoarse men in taprooms, resembling his personal friends at this date in their accent and the bias of their philosophy, Mr. Wotherspoon must have taken a good deal of unnecessary trouble to procure a conviction. Indeed, I remember my Mother saying once that the strength of language was proverbial, and that Vance was no exception to the rule, and not to be expected. My Mother's way of putting things may have been inconsequent, but then, one never had the slightest doubt of what she meant.

Anyhow, my Father's outside remarks frequently reached their audience, and laid him open to martyrdom in the cause of free speech many times before the incident recorded—my Mother's version of which was probably authentic; although she must have had some of it on hearsay.

"I decline to repeat his language," said Mr. Wotherspoon to Mr. Fothergill, "but it was not respectful, and I should say he deserved the sack."

"Give him his screw and put on another warehouseman," said Mr. Fothergill. So my Father had to accept the sack on the Saturday following.

I was a small boy of seven at this time, but I must have been observant, from the vividness of my recollection of the events of that Saturday afternoon. My young mind, catching its impressions from my Mother's way of looking at the situation, and supported by the cheerfulness (which may have been partly artificial) with which my Father accepted the sack, drew the inference that my Father had dismissed Fothergill's, and was now open to all kinds of preferment which his late employers' malice had hitherto prevented reaching him. This coloured our conversation as we walked along the main road towards London after the family dinner. I accompanied him on the pretext that I was competent and willing to prevent his taking more than a pint at the Roebuck.

"Could you lick three men?" I said, breaking silence disconnectedly.

"Could I lick free men?" repeated my Father after me. "In course I could! Who's to prevent me, young 'un, hay?"

I was silent and counted sixteen paving stones before I returned to the charge. I couldn't count seventeen as it was a sudden introduction of a new metre, so to speak, into the counting. So I resumed my enquiries.

"Could you lick three men if two of 'em was policemen?"

"That's accordin' to who the other might be," said my Father after reflection, which convinced my simplicity that he was replying in good faith.

"Could you lick three men if one of them was Mr. Fothergill and two of 'em was p'licemen?" This was a home-thrust, and my Father's prompt counter-stroke showed that he appreciated the connection with the recent conversation at dinner.

"If one of 'em was Mr. Fothergill I could lick six, and if two of 'em was Mr. Fothergill and Mr. Wotherspoon I could lick twelve."

I accepted this as meaning that the intense insignificance of the two would act as a drawback on the effectiveness of the police force; and I believe now that my Father intended this, and did not refer to any stimulus to his prowess which the sight of his recent employers might occasion. But I felt explanation was necessary, and sought for it in my Father's remarks at dinner.

"Is that because you expected a beggar to be an angel?" was my next question. For my Father had stopped my Mother in some too lenient view of Mr. Wotherspoon's conduct with "An old herring-gut like that has no call to expect a poor beggar to be a angel," and this had been a little beyond my comprehension.

"What's the young nipper a-driving at?" said my parent. "I tell you what, young man, if young beginners are going to ask questions as if they was blooming grandmothers, we shall never get to this here public house."

"This one ain't the Roebuck," said I, as my Father pushed me through a swing door into a sound of bad men and a smell of worse beer.

"No, it ain't, and I ain't a-going to it. If I goes to the Roebuck I ain't at liberty, accordin' to my ideas of honour, to take more than a pint. I want p'r'aps a pint and a 'arf, and I comes in here.—Quart o' four ale, Miss!"

The equivocation did not seem wrong to my infant mind; in fact, it impressed me as doing my Father credit, and made me resolve to try to be equally honourable. But the ordering of the quart brought a doubt into my face, to which my Father yielded an explanation.

"'Arf a pint for the young nipper, and three 'arf-pints for daddy—that's the 'rithmetic! What the nipper don't drink of his 'arf-pint, I drinks for his sake—so he mayn't get drunk, which at seven is vice."

The nipper didn't drink much of the half-pint, fortunately for him, and his Father performed the act of altruism imposed on him. Having done so, his attention appeared to be attracted by something inside the pewter.

"Strike me blind," said he, "if there ain't a bloody little hinseck at the bottom of the pot!" *

There was, apparently, and he fell out with a heeltap of beer on the metal counter, out of my sight.

"Pick me up, Daddy," said I. "For to see the hinseck," I added by way of explanation. I can remember now exactly how my Father's hand felt as he grasped me by the trousers and lifted me up, and the sound of his question. "What do young sucking bantams want with insects?"

"He'll be for crockin' him," said a Sweep with inflamed eyelids. "Crock him, yoong 'un, with your finger nail."

But my Father, who was getting towards the quarrelsome stage of beer, interposed upon the suggestion, not from any humanitarian motives, but in order to contradict the Sweep.

"This here hinseck," he said, "come out of my beer, wot I paid for, square. Consequent this here hinseck I account as *my* hinseck—and this here son of mine has been too well educated, though young, to presoom to crock this here hinseck unless I give leave.—Hay, young 'un? Or for that matter," added my parent with a sudden aggressive enlargement of his claim—"any one else."

"Any one else, wot?" said the Sweep.

My Father, instead of answering, addressed himself over the bar to the young lady thereof, as an umpire secure from intimidation behind a fortress of brass and pewter.

"I ask you, Miss," said he, "have I said or have I not said clear and plain, that I regard this here hinseck as belonging? And have I said or have I not said, equally clear and plain, that if any man (or for that matter any other) was to presoom to crock this hinseck on this here counter, I would fetch him a smack over the mouth?"

The young woman was filling one pot alternately at two taps and had taken too little from tap number one. So she had to exercise great discretion in stopping tap number two at the right moment. When she had done this, she referred again to number one, and it being an easy task to merely fill up to the brim, she took the opportunity to reply to my Father.

---

* I am sorry my father made use of this offensive adjective; but as he did so, and I distinctly recollect it, I feel bound to record it.

"Can't say I heard any such expression. Fourpence," the last word referring to the transaction in hand.

"Anyhow you put it," said the Sweep, "I'd crock him myself for a farden."

And without waiting for any security of payment, he did it straightway, over my shoulder.

I glanced around to see the effect of the smack. It had followed the provocation so quickly that the Sweep's hand was not back in time to stop it.

"All outside. Nothing in here. Nor yet in the street." Thus far the lady of the beer-handles—I was close to her; so I heard her voice above the tumult of awakened partisanship which filled the bar the moment after the smack. I heard that, and I noted with some disappointment that the smack had *not* been over the Sweep's mouth. It was the first time I had ever had a doubt of my Father's infallibility.

"Right you are, Miss."—"Git 'em outside."—"Git 'em round the Rents and down the lane."—"Git 'em round the bark o' Chepstow's, and across."—"Git 'em along the Gas-gardens—land to let on building lease—that 'll do, shove along—land to let on building lease. If a copper don't spot you, you'll 'ave it quiet enough for 'arf an hour. Git your man out; we'll git ours."

"Don't let the child go after them," said the bar lady.—But the child had slipped down off the bar, and the only person left to stop him was too drunk to take instructions—had he not been so, he would have been sober enough to follow the rabble. The child was outside the swing door just in time to see the tail of the crowd turn a corner and disappear. But he could have followed even guided only by the scattered pursuing units that came from far behind him, endowed with a mysterious knowledge (acquired Heaven knows how) that there was a fight, and that it would be to be found (if not too late) acrost the Gas-gardens on some land with a board up—and that you were on no account to turn round by the eel shop, but follow on. This came hoarsely from one swift of foot as he passed a man with a wooden leg, who said sadly, "T'other side Chepstow's. It 'll be done afore I ever gets there." He added that he was by nature unfortunate, and was always a-missing of everything.

"So I just gives in, I does," said he. "What's the young beggar roaring about? 'It's moy Father!—It's moy Father!' *What's* your Father?"

"It's his Father what's a-goin' to fight," struck in another runner, speaking rapidly. "He's a-goin' for to fight Mr. Gunn, the buttin' Sweep, down the Rents and beyont the Piannerforty works, and you better look sharp if you want for to see anythink."

How on earth these particulars had been acquired I cannot imagine, but they revived the failing energies of the wooden leg in a miraculous way. The owner forgot my howls in his intensified interest, and resolving to "try it on anyhow," stumped away.

I followed on as fast as my small legs would carry me, but concealing my despair—for a laundress had shown a disposition towards commiseration and I didn't want to be stopped by benevolence or any other motive. The stragglers got fewer and farther between till they were revived by the new event of a police-constable, to whom particulars appeared to be needless, as he merely said, "Shut up, all on yer!" in reply to volunteered information. This last group vanished round a corner, and I panted after it. But I was getting frightened of what I might see when I arrived. I believe that had my Father really "landed" on the Sweep's mouth I should have gone on confident. But my faith had been shaken, and I went slower, wiping my eyes and recovering my breath.

I saw nothing of the fight. I was only in time to see, across the canal as I stood near the wooden foot-bridge, a returning crowd and a group it left behind. The crowd was returning as a cortège of certain Policemen, who had come mysteriously from the four quarters of heaven, and were conducting a black object, which I could see from the raised platform of the bridge was the Sweep who had crocked the insect. I looked for my Father in vain. Then my eyes went across to the group across the water, and in the middle of it distinguished a motionless figure on the ground, and I knew it was my Father.

I had before me a plain issue of Duty, to be done or left undone; and I should be glad to think that in after life I had always shown the resolution that I, a midget between seven and eight, showed on this occasion. I never hesitated a moment. The Sweep had killed my Father, and I could hear his bellowings of triumph as he came along, the centre of an admiring audience conducted by two Policemen. I cannot repeat them in full, but they recorded his conviction that the method he had employed (I heard what it was later) was the correct way to do the dags of such a one as his late opponent. The terms he applied to him could only be reported if it were certain that their meaning to my readers would be as obscure as they then were to me. They did not seem to me to make the fact that he had killed my Father (as I thought) any the worse. All that was left was to look for a missile. I saw one with a fragment of "Bass's Bitter" label left on it, lying against a dead cat by the pathway, a horrible jagged piece of glass. And in the middle of my recollection of that unwholesome dream, I see that jagged piece of glass and that cat's head, and the string tight round his throat that had strangled it, as clear as I saw it then. There was a round side to it to hold it by, so I was able to close my hand well on it. On came the Sweep and the Policemen's hats (they wore hats in those days), and the admiring throng. On they came to the bridge, and the tramp on the mud changed resonantly to tramp on the planks.

"I could larn you two bloody orficers a lesson sim'lar to that other . . . if I chose to, but——"

But no one ever knew the reason of Mr. Gunn's forbearance; for his last word merged into a hideous yell as the jagged bottle-end pierced his eye. It was by the merest chance that I hit him. Of course I had aimed, but what is the aim of a child of seven? Anyhow, it went to the right place—and the howls and curses of its human target bore witness to its arrival.

I had been concealed behind a scrap of fence at the bridge end when I made my shot. But so had two other boys—barefooted street Arabs of the sort the Board-Schools have cleared away. And these boys seeing instantly that my crime would be ascribed to *them* as universal culprits, scapegoats of humanity, exclaimed to each other in the same breath, "Make yer 'ooks, Matey!"—and bolted one to the left and one to the right, but keeping within whistling and yelling distance. An amiable young Policeman followed at a walk, on a line of pursuit bisecting the angle of the two lines of flight. He caught neither of the fugitives of course, but he rejoined the procession at the nearest doctor's shop, having slipped round by another road to avoid humiliation; and Mr. Gunn was taken in for provisional treatment at the expense of the authorities.

I was convinced my Father was killed, and too terrified to wait and see the second procession that I knew must cross the bridge later on; besides, there was Mother! So I left the crowd gazing blankly at two bottles of "show colour," and one leech, in the shop window; and set out for home, too heart-broken and scared even to feel the satisfaction of revenge.

Halfway I met two Policemen bearing a stretcher. I knew what was coming back on that stretcher. I had no need of the information volunteered by another boy, rather older than I.

"Don't you know what that is, you little hass?" said he, seeing my gaze fixed on it. "That there's the stretcher fur to put the beggar on what's dead. Straight out flat! Then he'll have a funeral, he will—corpses, 'earses, plooms, mutes!"—And he began a sort of pantomime of solemn obsequies; but as perhaps he felt the cast was insufficient, gave it up and danced.

The whole thing was getting more and more of a nightmare, and I was consciously becoming incapable of finding my way home. I began calling aloud for my Father to come and help me, even while I knew what had happened, and that he could not. Then I heard a stumping on the pavement behind me, and recognized it as the wooden leg of an hour ago. I felt that its owner was almost an old friend, especially when he too recognized me.

"Who's this here little chap a-hollering for his Father? He's number two, this is.—No—he ain't,—by gum! It's the very same over again," and then his voice changed as he added: "Look here, old man, I'll give you a lift. Wipe your eyes. Where do you want to go to?"

"Stallwood's Cottages, No. 13. It's the only house, please, that hasn't no name on the door, and it's next door to the laundry."

"There ain't no such place," struck in the boy who had called me a little ass, and who I really believe was a fiend in human form. "Don't you believe him. He's a-kidding of yer."

But the wooden-legged man seemed to be endowed with insight into character; for, merely remarking that he would half murder the speaker if he ever laid hands upon him, he swung me on his shoulder and stumped on. The fiend, however, having acquired a sort of footing in the affair, didn't mean to be left behind, and pursued us as close as he dared.

"'Arf murder me if yer like—*I* give leave! You may 'ole murder me too if yer like, if yer ever find such a s'elp-me-Goard place——"

And more to the same effect. But even the attempt to throw the statement into the form of an affidavit did not influence the wooden leg, which went steadily on, growing less and less perceptible to my failing senses, until at last it became a mere rhythmic accompaniment to a dream that I forgot as I woke to find myself deposited on the pavement, and the voice of my bearer saying: "Right you are, old chap! No name on the door, and next door to the laundry. You git along in sharp and go to bed."

And then in answer to my unspoken question (for the words wouldn't come), he added: "Never you fret your kidneys about your Father! *He* ain't dead! Trust *him!*—he'll live to be concerned in many quarts yet. Good-bye!"

And he whistled "Lucy Neal" and stumped off.

I did not share his confidence about my Father, but he had cheered me up. Had he been altogether fallible, he would have fallen a victim to the misstatements of the funeral boy. And him he had simply flouted! So I collected my courage, and jumped up to the bell-handle,—which was a pull-down one, or I couldn't have rung it,—I heard voices inside, and my Mother came to the door.

"Bless my soul, it's Joe without his Father again! Joseph, you let your Father go to the Roebuck! Where is he now?"

I was far more afraid of telling the awful truth to my Mother than I had been of anything else on that dreadful afternoon, so I resolved to give details later on. I had just enough voice in me for my Mother, stooping down to my level, to hear me exonerate the Roebuck, which I could do truthfully.

"Then if your Father didn't go to the Roebuck what for are you crying? Where did you leave him?"

I affirmed, truthfully, that I saw him last a-going away with several men towards the canal. I added, untruthfully, that I had losted my way, and the boys told me wrong. I thought my Mother was going to slap me. It would have made my mind happier if she had. But she only said, "Dearie me, whoever would be a woman! You come along and get to bed and go to sleep at once, and no nonsense." I was very soon wiping my eyes on a small dirty nightshirt, and contributing an occasional sob to the conversation that went on in the next room. I had declined supper, not so much because I did not want it, as to get out of sight and cry in the dark. I should now wonder more at myself for this, if I had not behaved in the same way fifty times since; indeed, the sorrow's crown of sorrows has always been to me not what the poet sings, but the communication of bad news to happy unsuspicion. I always feel as I then felt; as if it was my fault and *I* was responsible!

"What's the matter with the child?"—Thus the conversation ran on between my Mother and her neighbour, Mrs. Packles, from Packleses laundry next door, who had come in to tea and gossip.

"It's to be hoped nothing's the matter ser'ous, Mrs. Vance."

"Law, Mrs. Packles, Ma'am," said my Mother, "if I was to worrit every time Vance comes home late, there'd never be an end. Your petticoat is a-scorching."

"It ain't my best. If you was to spare me the toasting fork, now your piece is browned, I wouldn't spoil the knife-end in the fire over mine. Being likewise the butter knife."

"I was looking for it."—And my Mother began to butter her piece (as I could hear by the scraping), but she stopped uneasily and came into the bedroom and looked at me. I pretended to be asleep. She kissed me, making matters ten times worse; and I suffered pangs of conscience, but kept my counsel. She returned to the toast, and resumed the conversation.

"It's your *dress* scorching now, Mrs. Packles—do 'ee double it back like I do mine."——

I heard Mrs. P. accept the suggestion.

"Vance is that particular about bloaters that I was thinking we might wait till he comes? Tea-time,—he said. One bloater kept back to be done later, has a feeling of discomfort when you come in and other folks has finished. Don't you think so, Ma'am?"

There was the slightest shade of asperity in the question, and I read in it that Mrs. Packles had looked unsympathetic. She also said something, but I failed to catch it, owing to Mrs. P. having a defect in her speech. Like Timour, she had only one tooth above and one below; but then they didn't extend all along the gum, like his. However, she had the reputation of being a Tartar, and Mr. Packles used to confirm this report in public—perhaps I should say in publics. What Mrs. Packles had said evidently reflected on my Father.

"No, Ma'am," said my Mother. "On the contrary, Vance is by nature a sober man—not like neighbours of his I could name whose habits are proverbial, as the sayin' is. In some cases, as you know, Ma'am, the smell of beer is transparent, and in such, credit is given undeserved. In others, secrecy throws a veil, even I am told in high places, and none suspect. But Vance was ever that open nature! However, we will put the bloaters on the trivet if you say the word."

Mrs. Packles couldn't say the word for the reason I have mentioned, nor any word distinctly. But I understood that she waived defence of Packles against my Mother's insinuation, in consideration of the bloaters. Also that, to avoid the quicksands the conversation had so narrowly escaped, she passed in review the condiments or accompaniments to bloaters sanctioned by judges. I heard my Mother's answer:—

"Accordin' to me, Mrs. Packles, and I am not sing'lar, gin on no account! Coffee also, though no objection can be raised, if popular in quarters, is, to my thinking, contrary to bloaters. Now to 'ot tea and buttered toast, there can be no exception."

I felt that I was an exception. And how I repented my rash renunciation of supper while under excitement! I was getting very hungry, and there was no prospect of relief till breakfast, unless I cut into the conversation and risked further catechism about my afternoon. So I lay still and sucked my nightgown, of which I can distinctly recollect the flavour to this day. I only wish *it* had been an accompaniment of bloaters and hot tea and toast. Taken alone, nightgown juice is not nutritious.

Mrs. Packles murmured assent, and was about to enlarge on the gratifying topic when she was interrupted by a footstep outside.

"It's at your house," said my Mother; "somebody is ringing the laundry bell."—And Mrs. P. went out to investigate. A distant colloquy followed, between a man's voice and Mrs. Packles's substitute for one; but nothing audible to me, until my Mother's sudden—"Well, now!"—following on something she heard and I did not. The teacup she put down suddenly spilled and clicked on the saucer; but she disregarded it and went straight out after Mrs. Packles. Before the door had time to slam, I caught the words—"Are you Mrs. Vance?"—and recognized the step of a Policeman on the garden path. Then followed narrative of an unexcited sort from the Policeman, sobs and exclamations from my Mother, and sympathy from Mrs. Packles, who I felt sure was endeavouring to claim a fulfilment of prophecy recently and clearly made by herself.

"Oh, Joey, Joey, Joey!" cried my Mother, "go to bed again this minute. Your Father's in the Hospital, and I must go to him."

I had got out of bed and was standing in the doorway of the bedroom. As I find that I have in memory a picture of a small boy crying, with a very rough head, as well as of a large Policeman dripping (for it was raining hard) and my Mother pulling a hurried shawl on, and Mrs. Packles exhibiting sympathy, with the slightest flavour of triumph, I am inclined to think that the fifty-odd years that have passed since then have made me mix what I actually do recollect with what my Mother told me many times later. Otherwise how do I seem to myself to see, from the front room, that small boy standing in the doorway rubbing his grubby little face with his nightgown?

Perhaps I went back to bed; perhaps I didn't! Anyhow, my next clear memory is of sitting by the fire with Mrs. Packles, and of great satisfaction from fresh hot toast, which Mrs. Packles (who remained behind by request) intentionally made the vehicle of much less butter than she took herself.

I don't think she suspected me of having any story to tell beyond what she had already heard—or she would certainly have pumped me for it, instead of making the conversation turn on the moral improvement of little boys. I was much too frightened to tell anything, even if I had not been too sleepy and greedy at the same moment. I wasn't hypocrite enough at that early age to pretend I wanted to know what the Policeman had said. Or possibly I mistrusted my powers of playing out the part, if I embarked on enquiry from Mrs. Packles. Besides—it didn't matter! *I* knew what the Policeman had said a great deal better than I knew what Mrs. Packles was saying about (1) the necessity for the young to curb their inherent vices, or there was no knowing, (2) the accumulation of misfortunes all but herself were free from, but that she had to put up with, (3) her patience and fortitude under disaster, and (4) her power of anticipating events and no attention paid, not if she talked herself 'oarse!

Perhaps if I could have kept awake I should have known what it was to hear Mrs. Packles under a further drawback from hoarseness. But sleep overcame me, and I remember no more.

CHAPTER II

HOW JOE PREVARICATED. OF PORKY OWLS AND A SPORTING CARD. HOW JOE WAS A WITNESS; ALSO OF THE REV. MR. CAPSTICK AND OF MR. VANCE AS A CONTROVERSIALIST. HOW JOE VISITED HIS FATHER IN THE HOSPITAL.

"JOEY, you naughty story-telling boy, how dare you tell me your Father didn't go to the Roebuck?"

These were the first words I heard when I woke on the Sunday morning following. My reply was that it was the Hare and Hounds. I sat up in bed rubbing my eyes, and gave a confused account of the reasons why my Father had chosen the latter. I was quite under the impression that I was clearing his character and mine. So I was disappointed when my Mother called me a prevarication, and said it was more wicked to be a prevarication than a liar. I was sorry too at the revelation of a lower deep than lying, the evils of which my Mother had rubbed well into me.

"But it's his Father's doing, thank God, not mine," added my Mother. "He makes the boy as bad as himself. Though that I will say (and him a-lying in the Infirmary and losing the use of his limbs), poor Mr. Vance is by nature truthful and candid, and what he says to the child is 'eedless, and partakes of the nature of a joke."

A sympathetic murmur revealed a neighbour with an exactly similar experience in the next room. She wasn't Mrs. Packles, who was at the tub, though Sunday, but Mrs. Owls (or perhaps Howells), who bore testimony to identical behaviour on the part of Mr. Owls towards *his* son, known to me as Porky Owls, but to his family as Bobby. A continuous narrative of what Mrs. O. said to Mr. O. to correct this vice of 'oaxin' had to be ignored, as my Mother wished to extract information from me of what I had really seen.

"Didn't you see no Sweeps at the Roebuck, Joey dear?" said she. I shut my lips very tight and shook my head.

"I meant the Hare and Hounds."—I nodded.—"Now open your lips and tell me all about it, or I feel getting that short-tempered I shall slap you."

"I see one Sweep," said I.

"One Sweep bein' by name?" said my Mother.

"Mr. Peter Gunn. And he crocked a hinseck what was in Father's 'arf-quartern, and Father fetched him a smack over the mouth."

I feel quite loyal even now when I remember how I concealed that the smack failed to reach its destination. How I knew Mr. Gunn's name was Peter I cannot say. It had reached me somehow in the confusion.

"And then," I went on, "all the whole biling went out of the door and up the street and round the lane and acrost the canarl; and the loydy in the bar she said, 'Stop the child,' she did. But she was inside of the bar and couldn't get no holt of me, and I follered and follered 'em on and couldn't cotch 'em, and I got lost, I did. And then the boys told me the wrong way, and it was ever such a long time, and then a gentleman with a wooden leg he gave me a lift, and chucked me down on the pavement just acrost the way, and I come in and rang, and you come to the door."

I felt it politic to suppress the bottle end, and my playing David to the Sweep's Goliath. I didn't know what developments might follow if I told the whole story. But I was consoled for this amount of prevarication by the rigid truthfulness of my last words.

"Now, is that all?" said my Mother. "Don't shut your mouth and nod in that aggravating way. What do you say when you speak?"—I said, "That's all!"—"Very well, then," said my Mother, "now get up and clean yourself for Sunday."

Sunday passed miserably for my Mother and myself, but joyously for the neighbours, who fairly gloated over the satisfaction they derived from their sympathy with my Mother. It appeared on recapitulation that for weeks past a sort of Greek Chorus of prophecy had been performed by them, each having at some time or other predicted the whole, or most, of yesterday's events. I don't think that any of those who had foretold that Vance would come to grief from his pugnacity had actually named a Sweep who could butt, but short of that almost every feature of my Father's disaster was claimed as a fulfilment. In the course of the day further particulars of this hideous Sweep and his accomplishment came to hand. Porky Owls (who was about ten years old) had the good fortune to gather a narrative of the fight from a Sporting Card's conversation with some other Cards at the Beer'us in North Street with Barclay Perkins Entire wrote up big. The Card's opinion was that though Vance was not to say drunk, it would be short of the truth to say he was mops and brooms. Anyway, he was the worse, and shouldn't have been allowed to fight. The Card was a good authority on such a point; for he had yaller leather storkins, goyters they call 'em, with white buttons, and a 'at—and he smoked a sighgyar and knocked off the hash with his little finger. And he says, "Gunn," he says, "goes straight for his man's stummick with his head. Oh yes," he says, "Vance he landed a good round blow, a square one, on Gunn's head as he come,—would have stopped you or me,—but Gunn he says 'That's my nut,' he says, and down goes his man on his back! He ketches of 'im round the legs like. Vance," he says, "come twice to time, but where's the use with a man what can crosh you to a quart-pot with his head for a shillin' and for 'arf-a-sovering will putt you down a walnut on a stone floor, and come down on it with his 'ed, and 'and it you cracked for eatin' and him not a penny the worse? What become of Vance?" he says. "Well, what's left of him's gone to the Oarsepital." And Porky imitated the laugh with which the narrative concluded. He further heard that some on 'um was for arskin' if it was fair play; and the Card replied in substance that when all the umpires were drunk, errors were apt to creep in. But there seemed to have been a verdict to the effect that Mr. Gunn was entitled to the full advantage of his hard skull. It depended, of course, on how low you butted.

Porky also was able to inform me that when the coppers was a-conductin' of Gunn to the Station, some boys was a-aimin' and one of 'em heaved a bit of broken glast, and it cotched Gunn in the eye. The boys they got away, and Porky's soul rejoiced, not from any malice against their victim, but because they were boys, necessarily in league against all other classes. I kept my own counsel.

"Well, I never," said my Mother, after another interview with a Policeman who called during my interview with Porky Owls. "I do declare here's Joey will have to go to-morrow as a witness, and he don't even know what a witness is."

"I *do,*" said I, indignantly, "Barclay Perkins is a licensed witness. So's Mr. Shillibeer at the Roebuck."

"That's a licensed witt'ler, bless the boy," said my Mother, laughing. "Well, Joey, you'll have to go, and you must mind and tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"The whole truth about *everything?*" I asked. An affirmative nod from my Mother. I pondered deeply on this, as it seemed to me what it is the slang nowadays to call a large order—and later education has confirmed this view. I resolved, however, to tell the truth about everything in the universe, except the broken-bottle incident. I was convinced that revelations on that point would mean that that frightful Sweep would one day catch me and crock me with his thumbnail as easily as he did the insect.

Monday morning saw my Mother and myself on our way to a crowded Police-Court, where we were destined to spend the best part of the day waiting for me to be called as a witness. As a very small boy, packed in flush with the lower halves of a stuffy crowd of disreputable grown-ups cannot be expected fifty years later to be very clear about the proceedings, I will say nothing of them until our case is called, and will, so to speak, employ the time we are waiting in explaining one or two points without which my subsequent interview with the magistrate as a witness might be incomprehensible.

My Father was a very ill-informed man on religious topics—so much so that he imagined that the phrase "the Religious Public" meant Mr. Capstick's Chapel that my Mother went to on Sundays, and sometimes took me to. He conceived of it as a source of relief for spiritual thirst, as the Roebuck and its like were for material thirst. He was, therefore, ill-qualified to instruct the young. My Mother, backed by Mr. Capstick, had endeavoured to supply this defect, perhaps I should rather say Mr. Capstick backed by my Mother. But my capacity for misunderstanding was great or the Reverend Benaiah's instructions were liable to misinterpretation.

I remember especially how his lessons on early Jewish history lost value owing to a confusion of identities which a person of more insight would have foreseen and provided against. Even now, Moses the Prophet, and Moses and Son the clothiers, do not discriminate themselves with the clearness I should desire at times. My error was found out and corrected.

"There, I declare now," said my Mother, when I betrayed my misconception, "if that child hasn't got 'old of the idear that Moseses is Moses!"

I referred the matter to Porky Owls, who derided me for not knowing the difference. The former, he pointed out, were Jews and would go to Hell; and the latter was an Israelite and would go or had gone to Heaven, being in the Bible. I complimented Porky on his erudition, and he said, "Yes, I'm a wunner at knowing things, I am!"

However, this is a digression from a digression.

The Reverend Benaiah Capstick's strong point was (and it was not an original thought of his own) that insomuch as it was desirable that Grace should abound, and Grace could not abound unless sinners were forthcoming to supply objects of Divine Forgiveness, it was therefore right and fitting that that class of persons should be encouraged to perform their heinous function, and thereby make manifest to Mr. Capstick's congregation the Merits of the Creator of the Solar System.

My Father would remark, when this view was pronounced, that he for one would be very 'appy, only he didn't wish to inconvenience other parties. Mr. Capstick would then point out that in a case where the interest involved was so great, it was right to sacrifice others, as well as our own self-righteousness. My Father then raised new objections. "Wot I can't make out," said he, "is this here:—If a cove goes and sins, in the manner of speaking, to oblige, I'm blowed if I can see where the Merit comes in of forgivin' of him."

Mr. Capstick took exception to the manner of speaking, but met this Prussian attack with calmness. "My friend," said he, "there are many things you cannot see. Pray for enlightenment! In the case you suppose we cannot doubt but that the sinner who had the blasphemous presumption to conceive the idea of obliging the Almighty, would find out his mistake too late, like the foolish Virgins in the parable. Believe me, all his unrighteousness would be but as filthy rags! Sin such as is necessary to the existence of Grace, and in accordance with the Divine Purpose, must have its source in the depravity of the human heart."

My Father mused a little, and then remarked that he thought he could ackomerdate him at that too. Anyhow, he knew a party as could! I was an attentive listener to the discussion, and accepted it all in such good faith that I really felt a little surprised at Mr. Capstick's not at once asking for the name and address of the party.

My memory goes back from recalling as much as I have been able of the above conversation (and, to confess the truth, to having been obliged to fill it out in order that it should be intelligible—but it is a fair report in the main) to my half-suffocated little self in the crowded Police-Court. After long waiting I was able to gather that the next charge on the sheet was against Peter Gunn for Breach of the Peace—also for being drunk and threatening the Police when apprehended. I couldn't really hear the mechanical recitation of his evidence by the Policeman who had been first on the spot, but I caught the Magistrate's enquiry at the end.

"You say they quarrelled in a pot-house? Is there anything to show which provoked the fight?"

The answer I half heard seemed to me to be that there was nothing to rely on—which really meant that the young lady at the bar was the only credible witness, and that if the Police called her she would discontinue gratuitous supplies to the constable on duty. But there was a boy, Vance's son; mother said he had a version of the matter pretty pat. For I had repeated my tale in full as far as the Hare and Hounds went. Was the boy here? Yes. So the boy found himself confronting the august functionary whom he had usually heard spoken of as "the Beak." I was a little surprised to see no beak in the ordinary sense. But I heard some one say something about the Box, and thought perhaps the Beak was in the Box, and that the gentleman at the table meant to put it on later. My Father had frequently dwelt on the incredible queerness of the Starts that obtained in Law Courts. So I was prepared for anything and acquiesced. I contemplated the Beak's actual profile until I found myself (unreasonably, as it struck me) required to kiss a book. I thought, however, I should be equally unreasonable to refuse or demur, so I kissed it with a very loud smack to show good-will, and then saw Mr. Gunn in the dock, presenting a frightful appearance. His eye was bandaged over with surgical skill, and his face did not impress me any more favourably because a portion of it had been washed round the eye, leaving the remainder black with a streaky penumbra between. I shuddered and resolved more than ever to be a prevarication, at whatever risk to my soul, so far as my own share in the production of this hideous vision went.

"He looks a very small boy," said the Magistrate. And the Police-Inspector, who seemed to represent the prosecution, said: "Oh, *he's* sharp enough. He's nine year old."—"Eight in Orgust," said I.—"Eight I should have said," said the Inspector, as if it didn't matter. "You speak up, old chap, and tell his Worship what you saw at the Pot'us."

"Moy Father, he ordered quart o' four ale and giv' me some out o' the pot. Then he swallered off the rest, and when he come to the end he says strike me blind, he says, if there ain't a hinseck in this here pot. And he totes the hinseck out on the bar and he histes me up by the trousers for to see him. Six legs he had and wings like. And Mr. Peter Gunn he says, 'Crock him,' he says!

And moy Father he says, not if he knowed it! And Mr. Peter Gunn he crocks him hisself. And then my Father he fetches Mr. Peter Gunn a smack over the mouth. And there was words, and they went out for to fight, because the loydy in the bar said not in there."

"Does this child know the nature of an oath?" said the Magistrate.

"You know where little boys go to that tell fibs?" said the Police-Inspector. "Coorse you do! Speak up, my lad. Where will you go to if you don't speak the truth? Bein' on oath, mind you!"

"If I tells lies I shall go to Heaven because of the Divine Grace," said I, boldly; "Mr. Capstick says so."

The Magistrate.—"Who's Mr. Capstick?"

Me.—"Wot keeps the Religious Public in the Orfington Road."

The Magistrate.—"And Mr. Capstick says you go to Heaven for telling lies?"

Me.—"That Grace may abound—the Grace of the Lord."——

At this point the Inspector had to interpose with some elucidation, for I had picked up Mr. Capstick's pronunciation with his Divinity. After which I pursued my narrative.

"And Father he says, 'That cock won't fight.' After Mr. Capstick had gone, you know," I added; because I didn't want to give the impression that my Father had risen in open rebellion against religious instruction, in addition to his other sins.

Magistrate.—"And what did your Mother say?"

Me.—"Said I was best in bed. And then when I was a-gittin' orf my trousers, I heard Father say that cock wouldn't fight. Sim'lar I heard him say Mr. Capstick was a complicated beggar to hargue, and Mother she said tell truth and shame the Devil! But Mr. Capstick is a good and blessed gentleman, she says, and such we ought to pray for."

"A boy that thinks he will go to Heaven for telling lies is not much use as a witness, however sharp he is. Take away the boy." Thus the magistrate, and I was taken away and felt disgraced.

"His Father is, you say, in a bad way in the Infirmary?"

I think the Inspector or the Clerk of the Court handed in a medical report, and the Magistrate said "Hm!" and my Mother said "Oh law! oh gracious!" and showed symptoms of hysterics. And somebody said, "Silence in the Court!—Take the woman out if she can't be quiet." Then there was some more discussion, in which I think I heard the prisoner's voice, for it was a squeaky voice, when it came out, like a costermonger's that misses fire as often as not—so it was easily recognizable. His platform, as we should say nowadays, seemed to be a justification of butting. Great interest was shown by a husky male public. Then silence was called, and the Magistrate got his turn again. "This court," he said, "is not a court for the decision of questions of prize-fighting. If one man is killed in a fight, fair or foul, the other will have to take his trial for manslaughter. Provocation might be an extenuating circumstance. In this case there is no evidence to show which began it. Boy's evidence can't be accepted. Gunn will have to go to gaol unless he can find sureties. Next case! What's the next charge, Mr. Bottle?"

I need hardly say that I have had to reconstruct the Magistrate's remarks from later experience. In this last speech, though I carried away the meaning, the only words I could swear to (now that I fully understood the nature of an oath) are sureties and Bottle, and in respect of the latter I disbelieve my own evidence. I don't believe that Clerk of that (or any) court was named Bottle, nor that Inspector. But *sureties* I got all right as far as the sound went; only I misspelt it mentally and shuddered with dread lest *I* should be one of the *shorties* Mr. Gunn would find. So I was very glad when my Mother said we would go away, and perhaps if I was good they would allow me in at the Infirmary to see Father!——

I suppose I was good, as they allowed us both in at the Infirmary on the following Wednesday. It wasn't a comfortable visit, as an evil-minded nurse with a squint impended over us all the time, and egged us on to completion of our interview almost before we had begun it. "You'll have to look sharp," she said, "the Doctor's coming." But when she said,—"You must clear out now. Time's up,"—no Doctor had appeared. I didn't believe in that Doctor.

My Father didn't seem to be at liberty to move, but his eyes turned round. "Is that the young nipper?"—he said, and then added,—"I'm a-goin' to be even with that there bloody Sweep, I am." I repeat my regret for having to record this expression; but I cannot help recollecting it.

"Perhaps the Beak will have him hanged," said I. I was not informed about the course of Justice in England, and my Father corrected me.

"He's only 'arf a Beak what you seen. He can't only send for trial—and then only for manslaughter. And even for that I should have to die first, and then I shouldn't live to see him convicted. Onfair and onjust, *I* say!"

"But his eye is spiled, Father," said I.

"But *I* didn't spile it," said my Father.

If I had not felt that the evil nurse would overhear and tell the Sweep, I really think I should have confessed up. However, I decided against doing so, as before, and launched into another topic.

"I say, Father! Mother says we ought to love our enemies."

My Mother murmured confirmation, but added that that young Turk (myself) had said,—"Catch me at it!" My Father laughed, and the evil nurse cut in with,—"The patient is not to laugh." So he stifled the laugh, and became black in the face. When he recovered he said, "On what accounts did you say that, hay?" and I replied that I would love them fast enough if they would love me. And my Mother said, "But then, dear Joey, there wouldn't be no enemies, and where should we be then?" My Father said, "That would never do!" and added that we was a-gettin' on to one of Mr. Capstick's Complicated Mixtures; by which he meant that we were getting involved in delicate questions of casuistry.

"Not but what I could find it in my 'art to forgive that bloody Sweep," he went on, "but if you come to considerin' of the conduct of the party what put that brick hedgewise up to ketch me in the small of the back, and it's wery sure that you may fall and fall a hundred times and none the worse, and no motive but sheer unquorlified malice, and a perfect stranger."——

My Father forgot that he had begun a sentence, or saw no way to a grammatical exit from it. So he stopped short and merely said "Damn him!" My Mother suggested the possibility of undesigned accident and he replied, "Accident be damned!" and the evil nurse cut in again with "That patient is not to get excited and take his hands out of bed," and after a minute or two came and routed us, as well as one or two other visitors, and drove us forth with contumely, refusing information about the probabilities of the case. "Can't say yet awhile," was all we got. "Thank you, Ma'am," said my Mother—so meekly that the evil nurse relented and made the concession of saying, "*I* shouldn't be in a fuss about him, if *I* was you."

There was a vague implication in this (as in the remarks of the wooden-legged man) that my Father, owing to his being such a *mauvais-sujet,* had special powers of surviving spinal concussion. Their forecast was certainly right, for in about three weeks he was fit to be moved—or at least *was* moved, and escaped little if any the worse.

CHAPTER III

OF JOE'S FATHER'S CONVALESCENCE, AND OF HIS CONNECTION WITH A BENEFIT CLUB. OF JOE'S EIGHTH BIRTHDAY, AND OF HOW A VERY LITTLE MAN SOLD HIS FATHER A SIGNBOARD.

Owing to my Mother's care and foresight the financial strain resulting from my Father's being thrown so long out of work was not so bad as it might have been. She had persuaded him to become a member of the Workman's Benefit Club two years before, and he had paid twelve monthly subscriptions. But throughout the year he proclaimed his intention of stopping the subscription unless some accident happened to enable him to reap the fruits of his self-sacrifice. No one could make him understand that there was any sanguinary use (as he required that there should be) in paying the price of so many quarts of ale and not getting a stiver back for it. I asked him what a stiver was, and he said, "Never see one, so I can't say." When the twelfth subscription had been paid, and no stiver came (to my regret, as I wished to know about it), my Father told my Mother she might go on payin' of it if she liked. She did not like, but she did it, out of the scanty proceeds of her trade, announced in the window as "Pinking done here," as if she had been a sort of professional duellist. And when my Father came to grief, she applied for a weekly payment as stipulated in the Rules of the Society.

I believe that there was dissension in that Society on the question whether Vance was entitled to this. A Peace-Party appeared within its ranks, and its Members would have been branded as Sentimentalists, Doctrinaires, and Faddists had the Society been acquainted with those terms. But my impression is that they have enriched our vocabulary only recently. I may be mistaken in this, but it is certain that no expression stronger than bloody sneaks ever reached my ears. The view of the Sneaks was that my Father's mishap did not come within the meaning of the Society's Rules as an accident, and that he was entitled to nothing. The opposite, or War-Party, consisting of the majority of the unofficial members, rose as one man and denounced this view. It supposed that the Peace-Party was a-goin' to put an end to all fightin' next. The fact that my Father was in liquor at the time of the fight also procured him a good deal of sympathy—so much so that the eight shillings a week he received was prolonged (to spite the Peace-Party) a good deal beyond the appointed limit. I gathered these points from my Mother's conversation.

"And generous and right I call it," she continued, "of the Society to break through its rules for Vance, he having to a very great extent called the members language. But his 'art is that good, language may be overlooked. But I do admit, Ma'am, if you ask me, that I do *not* think, strictly speaking, that Vance *was* entitled; though thankful, I need hardly say."

The reply of Mrs. Packles was at some length, but was absolutely unintelligible to me from beginning to end. My Mother's rejoinder made it clear that Mrs. P. had made some apology for the Peace-Party or Sneaks.

"Yes, Ma'am," she said, "excusable if not animated by personal motives. But with such can we wonder if Derision is provoked and the offendin' Members is accosted in the street with application for a tract?"—For it appeared that the War-Party would touch its hat with affected humility to the Peace-Party, and apply for the donation of a tract, as my Mother said.

Of course even with this windfall my parents were very hard up. My Father ate more than his share of breakfast and dinner, as an invalid who required feeding up; and enjoyed his convalescence amazingly. He seemed to take kindly to doing nothing at other people's expense, and spent a pleasant two months or more on his back, devising means of being even with Peter Gunn. Then the Doctor of the Society suggested the view that he wouldn't recover the use of his legs until his allowance was stopped.

"Maybe you're right, Mister," said my Father, candidly, "but you won't be for stopping for a month yet. Make it a month."

The Society made it a month, and the patient, as soon as he had obtained a pledge to that effect, took up his bed metaphorically and walked. His pins were rather dot and go one, he said, but he looked forward with confidence to being even with the Sweep.

In the meantime, the Society's allowance lapsing at the end of the month, it became imperative to my Father to git on a job. But while professing feverish anxiety for work (for its own sake, quite irrespective of salary), what he represented as an hereditary instinct of caution prompted him to delay accepting any one of the numerous offers which he suggested were showered upon him. "I ain't a-goin' to jump down any of their throats," he said. "My Father warn't the man to throw hisself away, and *your* Father, Joey, he takes after him."

I had some difficulty in analyzing this, which seemed to me rather like a Complicated Mixture of Mr. Capstick. I did it, however, with the result that I could not reconcile the image it gave me of my Grandfather persecuted with applications for his services, and my Father's report of him at other times.

"Drove the same cab he did, all his life," he would say, "and wery nearly the same prad." I had to rest contented with a mixed impression of my ancestor, and to accept as a family trait the calmness with which my Father spent his days smoking and so forth while my Mother plied her industrious scissors at the mystery of Pinking. A very small store of cash at a Gothic Savings Bank standing back in a garden in the Orpington Road helped out our small resources at this time, or I don't precisely know what we should have fed on.

My Father, however, did not (it appeared later) spend this interval of idleness entirely in hatching schemes for being even with the Sweep. He apparently thought seriously over the advantages which the Employer has over the Employed, and cast about in his mind for the best means of becoming one himself.

My first information to this effect reached me one fine summer evening in August, which I remember the more vividly because it was my birthday and I was eight, and my Father had given me a boxwood peg-top and my Mother a new pair of socks she had made herself. This day had been a fine day and no mistake—so the popular verdict said. There seems too often in these days to be a mistake, and we feel chilly and grown old.

"Just to think of the young nipper having turned eight!" said he. "We shall be a-havin' of him eighty next."

This seemed so illogical that I felt bound to say something in defence of the intervening seventy-two years. "Well, anywise, what 'll you be next year?"—"Nine," said I.—"Very well, then," said my Father, "we'll let it go at that, and when next year comes it 'll be time enough to bust our bilers over it."

I accepted this as a compromise. But I thought it very unfair of my Father to add, "You see, I wasn't so very far wrong after all." I was, however, prevented from returning to the charge by the appearance of a very little man indeed, who was pushing a truck and who stopped outside our gate.

"I suppose, Guv'nor," said he to my Father, "you couldn't oblige me with a scrop o' wire to wire out the hile out of my pipe. The drorin' of it is stopped." My Father made no remark, but went into the house.

"I knowed you was an obligin' Guv'nor," said the little man.

My Father returned with a hairpin of my Mother's. "You can have that," he said, "subject to bendin' of it back and wipin' clean after use." The terms were accepted, and I watched the cleaning of the pipe with great interest. It was so short a pipe that it was cleaned without straightening the hairpin. The little man wiped the latter on his neckcloth, and handed it back to my Father.

"With many thanks to yourself, Guv'nor," said he. "It's wery seldom I find myself without a piece of wire, and I felt quite at sea like." This was the first time I had heard that expression; so my mind was immediately on the alert to enquire as to the connection between naval matters and shortness of wire supply.

"You might run your eye through my stork-in-trade," said the little man. So my Father and I crossed over the very wide margin of pathway with a four-foot stone pavement along the middle and stood under the battered remains of what was once an elm tree in a country road, and ran our eye through the stock-in-trade.

It consisted chiefly of old ironware, tools, screwdrivers and chisels, hammers and gimlets, and bradawls, but each one of a different age, size, and seeming: of pincers that didn't open far enough; of pliers of which the side nipper was worn out; of foot-rules that had come apart at the hinge and been unprofessionally repaired; of a substantial box-screw with a cross-lever loose through a hole in the bulb at the top; of a beautiful stoppered bottle richly engraved with a label describing something which I presume no one ever wanted to bottle, or this one could never have fallen so low; of an accordion—and so forth, through a long list of second-hand, third-hand, fourth-hand things, all more or less past service, except things by nature invulnerable, as pincers or the box-screw above mentioned.

"Licensed 'Awker," said the little man, replying to an enquiry of my Father's as to how his trade should be accurately described. "But some, they prefer to call me an *I*tinerant Marine Store Dealer; some, a General 'Ardware. It's all how you look at it!

And you'd be surprised what a good trade it is! O' coorse you has to know how to do it, or where would you be in no time?"

He went on to indicate some of the secrets of success. It appeared that so long as he made a parade of his unwillingness to sell, representing himself as an eccentric person who had a strange taste for wheeling a barrow of rather useless articles about the streets, quite independently of mercenary considerations, he was always sure to find a customer.

"Just you rub it in to them that *you* don't want to sell a gimlet or a turnscrew, and that gimlet or that turnscrew they'll want to buy. New things, o' coorse, is another rule altogether! Where would ever be the use of puttin' a couple o' gross o' bran'-new chisels in a winder, and standin' 'ollerin' at the shop door that you didn't want to sell 'em? You'd only give the public a distaste. Sim'lar, when I sees a lot I want to purchase cheap, I says, 'Sorry I didn't come by your way yesterday,' I says, 'afore I'd bought a reg'lar small cart-load of that wery sort which I shan't trade off in a hurry.' Why, they'll come runnin' down the street after me a'most offering of me a drink for to take the goods off their hands for nothing."

"You'll never sell *that* now, I'll wager," said my Father, touching a piece of board with some writing on it.

The little man had his pipe in his mouth while talking, and as his voice was very inaudible (though nothing to Mrs. Packleses) when his pipe was admitted through a defective tooth-space on the left, and only became clear when he shifted it to the right, his speech had come in gusts, like linnets in the pauses of the wind. He took the pipe out altogether now to gain emphasis for a sweeping repudiation.

"Never—sell—that!" said he. "And the orfers I've had for it! Why, only look at it!"

"This here young chap's a scollard," said my Father, "and he'll read us off what's wrote on that there board with a'most any man in England."

I didn't understand my Father's motive for pretending he couldn't read it himself (which I knew he could), but I felt proud of being as it were pitted against the University, and conscientiously read as follows: "C. Dance, Builder. Repairs. Drains promptly attended to." *Promptly* puzzled me a little, but my interpretation passed muster.

"Now if you've had orfers, why didn't you sell this here board?" said my Father.

He.—"Cos none of 'em come to a half-a-crown."

"I'd have gone to half-a-crown myself," said my Father, "if there'd a been a little more on it."

He.—"Why, what more do you want?"

My Father.—"If there'd been Wan-Proprietor on it, I'd have took it off you myself for half-a-crown."

He.—"I don't see any Wans."

Father.—"This ain't the only place in the world. The Wans is elsewhere. I could have made shift to write in a new name, and it would have come in 'andy——"

He.—"It's a pity, 'cos we might have done a trade over it. But a party by name C. Davis having offered eighteenpence on the grounds of easily altering of the name, I should be blamed by my missus if I took less than half-a-crown."

F.—"It wouldn't be not to say any good to me without Wan-Proprietor, or I might have gone to one and nine. But without Wan-Proprietor I couldn't pass a shilling."

I did not then understand the value of the dramatic fictions with which the bargainer in all countries adorns, disguises, or accounts for his motives. So I was taken aback at the little man suddenly saying, "Make it fifteenpence," and my Father producing that sum. Where he can have got it I can't tell—but he handed it to the little man and received the board in exchange. Its vendor seemed to wish to place his own conduct on a logical footing, for he said as he prepared to resume his march, "Coorse it's always pleasant to oblige an obliging Guv'nor; and as for C. Davis wot I spoke of, he's only a chap that comes from 'Ackney on Saturdays and squints."

Did he, I asked myself, go back to Hackney on Saturday when he had squinted? But I grappled in vain with the problems suggested, and gave them up in despair. Besides, I had to puzzle out why my Father had purchased this board, and what earthly use it could be to him?

It may seem odd that I did not at once observe the resemblance between C. Dance and C. Vance (my Father's name was Christopher). I suppose that my own name presented itself to me not as a mere sound or collection of letters, but a mysterious entity having qualities of its own distinguishing it from all other created things. Others have told me the same; and my belief is that most people have the same experience of the aspect of their names. Anyhow, the possibility of altering Dance to Vance, by changing the first letter, came to me as a new light when my Father, having given my Mother a great shock by announcing his extravagance, pointed it out to her.

"I was thinking," said he, "of putting up some sort of a notice-board, and this here will look like an old-established goin' concern." My Mother replied by expressing a hope that the venture might prove Providential, under the blessing of God, but she could not refrain from adding, "But oh, my dear Vance, one shillin' and threepence!"

"Two tizzies and one thrup'ny bit," said my Father, unfeelingly; "and I say, Joey, Sir, who's that boy's father wot you got such a basting about?" As there had been one or two bastings consequent on boys, I thought a minute and said, "Wot? that one that we shoved a 'ap'ny cracker in the old Bloke's letter-box and then giv' a postman's knock, and the nurse went into Hixterics?"—"No, no," said my Father, "long afore that—him what got his father's colour-toobs and done you Vermilion and hisself Rooshian Blue."

"Oh," said I, "of course that's Gummy Harbuttle—Father's name W. Harbuttle, Sign-writer-and-decorated-shop-fronts-completed-at-the-shortest-notice." All which I delivered rapidly as the true and proper designation of Mr. Harbuttle.

"Wery good, then. Round we goes to-morrow morning to Mr. Parbuckle and we'll see if he won't make good this here error in this here signboard." For my Father thenceforward treated the letter he proposed to correct as an erratum due to the ignorance of the original composer.

Next morning round we went. My Father persisted in speaking of Mr. Parbuckle till we got to the shop, when he grudgingly admitted that he supposed the beggar's version of his own name was right. He gave no particular account of the provenance of the signboard, merely suggesting rather than affirming that it was done wrong at the first go-off and hadn't never been of any use to him. Which was perfectly correct if intended as an indictment of Providence, but required for perfect truth the additional statement that it had only been done wrong for my Father because it had been done right for Mr. C. Dance (whoever he was) who had to pay for it.

Gummy Harbuttle, the son of the house, was in the shop stirring paint through a strainer. He and I acknowledged each other distantly, in the manner of boys when parents are to the fore. Mr. Harbuttle senior was having a bit of breakfast, and I hope acted on my Father's intimation that there was no 'urry. He presently appeared, wiping the white lead on his apron into the rear-guard of the disappearing bit of breakfast, and endangering his constitution.

I think he must have suspected something deceptious in the alteration of the letter, in spite of my Father's semi-explanation; for he entered into the job with the enthusiasm of an Italian forger of an Old Master.

"I see," said he, "you want it all alike all over, like as if it was all done by the same hand. I'll do it so you'll never know it wasn't—cracks and all. Cost you a shillin'. Couldn't do it for less. You see, there's a little bit of gildin'."

The question of style had to be considered.—"You couldn't call it Gothic lettering, now could you?" said Mr. Harbuttle. "Nor yet it ain't exactly Roman." My Father replied that he was not a dab at this sort of thing, while on the other hand Mr. Harbuttle was an acknowledged dab. He would therefore leave it to Mr. H. to gammon the sorts together in his own way, which is what I suppose would be described as an Eclectic treatment. Mr. Harbuttle said if my Father sent his boy with a shillin' on Monday s'ennight he would find the job done and dry. It would want all that time to dry. My Father said he would; and I thought what fun it would be carrying that signboard through the public streets all by myself. But I wasn't allowed to go alone. My Father came too as a protection, and I had to console myself with carrying it on my head at intervals.

CHAPTER IV

A SHORT CHAPTER, BUT THEN IT IS THE THIN END OF A BIG WEDGE. FOR IT TELLS HOW MR. VANCE GOT HIS FIRST BUILDING JOB.

My Mother soon became convinced that my Father's investment of two and threepence was not altogether so mad a one as it had at first seemed.

"I'm sure," she said, "one never would have thought it! It do look exactly as if it had been there since Doomsday." This was merely a slip of her tongue as she and Mr. Capstick knew all about Doomsday. "And I will say the effect that board has on the passing spectator is Electrical." My Mother went on to quote a convincing instance. "Why, there was the Dust, only the other day, stopped ringin' of his bell and says, to think that there board should have been there all those years and him never seen it!" My Mother evidently thought that to stop a Dustman ringing his bell was like damming Niagara.

There came another convincing proof of the Electrical effect of the board within a fortnight of its being attached to the wall of our cottage.

My Mother, as I have mentioned, had for a long time been a depositor of small sums in the Savings Bank I have described as Gothic; I am not sure though that that is the correct way of classifying it; Mr. Harbuttle would have known. Perhaps I should have said Rustic, perhaps Swiss. Anyhow, it had latticed windows and a high-pitched roof, and a good deal of external woodwork, and a small porch covered with honeysuckle,—and altogether looked like a place for a virtuous heroine to be persecuted in. It is gone now, and I cannot correct my impressions. Besides, it doesn't matter in the least what it was like. What we have to do with is the elderly middle-aged gentleman who used to attend to the business on the second Monday in every month. He did this service gratuitously; alternating attendance with another gentleman on each fourth Monday who was not such a favourite with the customers as his coadjutor, because he didn't let them talk, and confined himself brutally to business. On the other hand, Dr. Randall Thorpe not only accepted, as necessary to Banking Transactions, family details of the reasons for withdrawing deposits, but used to fudge the accounts to the credit of the latter, and make good deficits out of his own pocket in what he considered deserving cases.

My Mother returned from the Savings Bank one evening bursting with the importance of her news "Only to think, Vance," she said, "Dr. Thorpe, he ackchly took notice!"—"Took notice of what?" said my Father.

But my Mother was not the woman to do injustice to important news by informal or premature disclosure. So she said, "Now just you have half-a-minute's patience till my shawl and bonnet's off, and then I'll get you and Joey your Teas. I see the kettle's on the bile, and I'm glad you had the sense to it."

My Father remarked, while we had the half-minute's patience, which had to be distributed over eight, that my Mother was just like 'em. I asked like whom, and my Father said females. This seemed a suggestion that my Mother had a sex to herself, and I felt inclined to pursue the subject. But my Mother returned and said, "Now, Joey, you be a good boy and 'and me out the tea-things." I did so out of the deep cupboard near the window, that had a semi-circular back to it and a round top which absorbed half the available corner-space. When all arrangements were complete, my Mother re-broached the interesting topic.

"Well," she said, "I *do* like that! Saying *what,* and pretending not to know. Why, of course, C. Vance, Builder. Repairs. Drainage promptly attended to."

"What did he say then? Spit it out, Missus." I must explain that my Father would sometimes assume a manner, difficult to describe, but which went a long way to make it possible to say offensive things without giving offence. It was jocular and semi-bacchanalian, and conveyed an impression that the speaker was too lazy and good-humoured to take the trouble not to speak slightly through the nose, or to use any sibilant except z. I fear this doesn't make it any plainer—and I shall have to be content with recording that my Mother showed no resentment at being told to spit it out, but merely said, "Go along! Spit it out, indeed!" and then gave the substance of her communication.

"Dr. Thorpe he says first, 'What!—another dror' out!'—he says. And I says, 'Yes, Doctor, and myself sorrowful-like to have to. But my man's allowance from the sick-fund coming to an end, and the boy to feed, disposes of one's savings gradual and not noticeable.'—'So it does, Mrs. Vance,' says he. 'But you're richer than you think by five shillings according to the books this week, so we won't begin to cry till next week.'—'You're truly kind, Doctor,' says I, and then he says, 'By the bye, your name must be a name in these parts 'cos I see it on a board in a 'ouse in a sort of stand-back off the High Road.'—'That's our house, Doctor,' says I, 'and we call the bit in front the garden.'—'Well, then,' says he, 'your husband does buildin' jobs.' And I says, 'Yes.' And he says, 'They was enquiring at the 'ouse for some one to see to the nursery chimney, likewise the drains in the basement; and I can't promise the job to Mr. Vance, but if he comes round to-morrow morning at nine, and don't find anything to do, I'll give him a couple of shillings to cover expenses.' And then he giv' me his card, and here it is!"

My Father took the card, looked at it, and buttoned it into a pocket. He was evidently inflated with gratification, but too proud to allow it, and he took this method of showing a slight self-assertion for the better preservation of a fiction about male authority. A few moments passed of complacent silence on his part, mixed with reluctance to concede approval to a female. But my Mother, having said her say, was not going to give way to this little bit of husbandly discipline-mongering.—Of course she beat, and my Father had to speak.

"You ain't sendin' me my tea," he said.

"'Cos you never asked for it! Don't you slop it over now, Joey!"

My Father took his time over his tea and came for more. Then he said, as one to whom an abstract truth occurs, unconnected with any subject under discussion, "Females is sometimes wrong, Joey."

"What about, Daddy?" said I.

"Females is sometimes wrong about signboards which their husbands places in front of their 'ouses, on the left-'and side of the door." He adhered in manner to the suggestion that he was merely pointing a moral for the benefit of humanity, without special reference to any recent incident.

"Well, there, I declare now, Vance!" struck in my Mother, good-humouredly, "you'll never be done chaffin' me about that!—And all I said was two and threepence was a lot of money!"

"I know a boy," said I, irrelevantly, "wot chucked for coppers and won two and ninepence." Neither of my parents seemed to think this boy a desirable topic; but whether it was on that account, or because he had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand, they both said, "Shut up, Joey!" I don't know.

"But seriously now, as the sayin' is, Vance dear," my Mother went on, "what *do* you know about buildin'?"

My Father picked up his empty pipe from the tea-tray, where it had lain since he began his tea, tapped the ashes carefully out on a clean bit of the deal table, blew through it, filled it, lighted it, and settled down to a comfortable smoke. "What was you a-askin' of me?" said he.

"*What* do you know about buildin'?" said my Mother, changing only an accent in her question.

"Nothin' whatever," said my Father.

"And, my gracious me," cried my Mother, in great concern, "there you've gone and advertised as such! Well, I never! And it's *Builder* wrote up clear and unmistakable."

"That's the p'int, my dear," said my Father. "That's the whole p'int! Builders knows nothing about Buildin'."

"Your Father he's talkin' that nonsensical, Joey, that you best come and help me clear away tea."

My Father finished his pipe while the tea-things disappeared. He then took me on his knee and proceeded to enlighten me on the subject in hand. He excluded my Mother from participation, and addressed himself solely to me.

"That's just precisely the whole p'int, Joseph, my son," he said. "Builders knows nothin' about Buildin'. Other people knows *somethin'*, if they don't know much, but Builders they knows abso-lootly nothin'!"

"Does Mr. Capstick know anything about Buildin'?" said I.

"Mis-ter Capstick! Why, he ain't a tradesman at all! O' coorse I'm speakin' of tradesmen. Mr. Capstick's a sort o' second'and clergyman, and they don't know nothin' at all about anything. My meanin' is clear! When a man's a Carpenter he mostly knows a little about Carpenterin'. When he's a Jiner, sim'lar. When a Bricklayer, Plasterer, Paper 'Anger, Painter, or Glazier, the same 'olds good of any tradesman. But when he's a Builder he knows nothing, and no need to neither. He ain't called on to Carpenter and Jine, nor yet if he don't know a Bat from a Closure it's no account, nor if he knew no more of Paperhanging than how to fold back it wouldn't hurt him. He'd never want to touch a paste-brush."

"But you know," said my Mother, "you must know *something* about it, or you couldn't poll-parrot to that degree."

"Well, my dear," said my Father, mollified, lapsing from his didactic to his jocular manner, "coorse a man can't ketch others out for knowin' nothin' unless he knows something hisself. Besides," he added, with still further concession, "I've been a 'andy man time and again, at an odd trade or two. Joey and me'll go over to this here Dr. Thorpusses, Popular Willer, to-morrow mornin' at nine precisely."

This was said in an incisive manner, to give a favourable impression of the promptitude with which drains were going to be attended to.

CHAPTER V

OF JOE'S VERY FIRST VISIT TO POPLAR VILLA. OF ITS DRAINS AND THEIR STENCH. OF HOW JOE SAW HIS FIRST REAL YOUNG LADY AT HOME. HOW SHE KISSED JOE, AND JOE LIKED IT. OF A PEAR TREE THAT LIVED THENCEFORWARD IN JOE'S MEMORY. OF HIS RETURN HOME.

WE started for Dr. Thorpe's the next morning early. My Father mispronounced his name in several different ways in the course of our conversation on the road, and I need hardly add that his motive in doing this was to express contempt for his fellow creatures generally, by utilizing a particular sample as an object of contumely Thorpe is rather a difficult name to mispronounce, and I fancy he resented this, and it made him more determined to succeed in discovering a successful distortion.

"Has he a railway-lamp over the door?" said I.

"This here Dr. Thrupp," said he. "May be yes, may be no! It's accordin'."

"Has he two whopping big bottles of blue and red medicine in the winder?" I further asked. I was thinking of the shop Mr. Gunn had been taken into to have his eye adjusted.

"Who? Dr. Crupp or whatever his name is? He ain't got a shop. It's a Willer. What's a Willer? It's a 'ouse with a stables for a one-'orse-shay, and a green'us and a gardener and some scarlet geeraniums! And what's geeraniums? Well—geeraniums is what they sells on the barrers. And what's a green'us? Well, it's glass, and there's a grapewine in it, and it's where they shoves the garden pump away when not in use,—which is mighty seldom, as it's always out of order. And that's enough for any young nipper to know at one go-off."

I was greedy of knowledge, and resented these small instalments. But I accepted my Father's broad hint, and was silent. Nevertheless, my mind was seriously exercised by the enquiry why people should harbour garden-pumps that were always out of order. Could no remedy be found for such an unsatisfactory state of things? After about a mile of road I thought I had done my duty by silence, and reopened the subject. "It isn't only garden-pumps," said my Father. "All pumps is alike. Always out of order they are! They all goes out of order if you stop pumpin' for 'arf-an-hour."

"Then you have to keep on pumping," said I. "That's about it," said my Father. I need not say I felt rather unhappy at this, as it seemed to consign so many slaves to the pump-handle for life. But we were just arriving at Dr. Thorpe's.

"Let's see!" said my Father, "what did your Mother say this here Doctor's name was?"

"You've got his card in your weskit pocket, buttoned in," said I.

"Coorse I have! Sharp nipper!" And my Father got out the card. He gave a very slight snort and nod of disparagement, as if he had identified Dr. Thorpe as a public character of opposite politics. And this brought us to the gate of Poplar Villa.

"Now which of these gates do they expect us to go in at?" said my Father. For Poplar Villa had two, one to let carriages into the semicircular gravel road in front of the house, the other to let them out. "If we'd 'a' drove here in our own broom, I should 'a' said the left, so as to git out on the left after the coachman 'd rang the bell at the top of all them steps. But bein' as it were out already, we may go in orposite to the carriage company, and ring the side bell." Which we did, with the result that we were asked by a young lady with a cap and a clean print dress with large round brown spots all over it whether we were the man for the drains. As we were, or were at any rate the man and boy, we entered, on condition that the boy wiped his feet, which he forthwith did much longer than was necessary, from a sense of duty,—and to rise to the occasion.

A good many things then occurred outside the range of my experience. It transpired that the Master was in his study and mustn't be worrited; but that a lady whose name I didn't catch would attend shortly to give directions. This was confirmed by a real young lady (I had never seen one at home before) who said from the end of a passage that Aunt would come in a minute. I wondered whether all young ladies at home were beings as glorious and enthralling as this one, and thought how jolly it must be if they were. She seemed about fifteen, and had her apron or skirt full of apples or pears. I found after they were early pears, and that they were being stewed. I have since smelt stewing pears, and the smell always brings back this young lady passing through a streak of morning sun that got in at the edge of the yellow blind behind her. If I had been older I should have fallen desperately in love, but I was too young to know how to do that; so I did the nearest approach to it that I was capable of, which consisted mainly of substituting expectation of her next appearance for every other possible anticipation in life. I forgot discomfort about the imperfections of pumps. My feeling was one of thirst for a second dose of a girl standing in a sun-glint at the end of a passage, mixed with self-gratulation of having found anything so jolly to tell Mother about.

I was roused to mundane events by the rustle of important skirts descending the stairs. They were on an elderly lady of what I have since learned to call a genteel appearance. She was silver-grey all over—perhaps her dress was an Irish Poplin—and she had a pince-nez, through which she looked at my Father as if he were a thousand miles off (though we were really quite close) and said (exactly as though he couldn't hear her), "Is this the man?" and then, when satisfied on this point, "Is this the man's boy?" meaning me.

The impression I had of this interview (so far as I could be said to receive any impression after the collision of my perceptions with the vision at the end of the passage) was that this excellent lady never addressed my Father all the time, but spoke of him to space as "the Man," and he for his part replied direct. His answers without her questions will give the whole substance of the dialogue.

"Certainly, Marm! Any Bricklayin' work, Carpenterin', Plumbin', and Glazin'. Any work connected with the Buildin' Trades I undertake to execute to your entire satisfaction."

"Touchin' charges, Marm, and replying to your enquiry, my charges is always strictly according to work done, time *and* materials. And I should look forward 'opefully to submittin' an account to your entire satisfaction."

"If any reference required, on account of steadiness and sobriety, our Minister, the Rev. Benaiah Capstick, would I am sure be to your entire satisfaction."

"But in these respects all the years I've been in the Buildin' line, I have had the good fortune always to give my Employers Entire Satisfaction."

In a certain sense this was true, as there had been no Employers. I was recovering (by the time my Father reached this verse of the Litany above quoted) from the effects of the young lady, and I resolved to tackle my Father on the point at the next opportunity. At the risk of getting involved in a complicated mixture of Mr. Capstick's I decided to try and find out whether the entire satisfaction of a non-existent Employer with the drink and strong language of a person he was by nature unqualified to employ, was really any better a testimonial to virtue than his entire dissatisfaction would have been had he had the misfortune to exist.

The silver-grey lady decided, and mentioned to the Universe, that the Man appeared steady and sober. It then eventuated that the Man went up into "the Nursery" to look at the bricks in the chimney which were alleged to be making it smoke.

This was a mere *lever-de-rideau*—the principal stage business of the day being an examination of the Drains under the guidance of Dr. Thorpe; who I already foresaw, by some mysterious instinct, would be grossly ignorant on the subject, and but as wax in my Father's hands.

I remained downstairs in what I began to realize was "the Pantry," standing first on one of The Boy's legs and then on the other, till I was overwhelmed by the frightful suddenness of the reappearance of the young lady,—her very self, hair and all! And it was such pretty hair—only the lock on her forehead on the left side would get loose and drop over her very long eyelashes. And then it evidently tickled and had to be put back. She didn't seem the least embarrassed with her own existence or mine. But she appeared to be obsessed by a very minute child of about two, who required to be kept in check continually, or his original sinfulness got the better of him. His name was revealed as Joey, which struck me then as very curious, seeing that *I* was Joey! It really wasn't curious, as I have seen since, but I suppose Joeys happened to be scarce in our circle. He was a chubby little boy with very pale eyes and hair, rather as if he had been boiled. He was intensely voluble, and I heard him afar, before the Vision burst upon me a second time, causing me to collapse, like the Apostle in pictures of the Conversion of St. Paul. What follows consists of his remarks as soon as they became audible, sandwiched with those of the young lady. It is fifty years ago now, but I remember every word.

"I wants to go up that ladder."

"Come off my skirts, you little Plague, I shan't have a gather left."

"But I *wants* to go up the ladder—and if I may go to the vethy top I'll eat none."

"And how many will you eat, you shocking boy (kiss), if I let you go up one step and hold you?"

"Thumb" (reluctantly and evasively).

"Say some! You know perfectly well you're not to have any, especially after all the scum of that stew you've been having. You know perfectly well you've got a stomach-ache, if you'd only confess it."

"Who'th that Boy? I want'th to know who that Boy is?"

"Don't be rude and point—of course that's the Man's Boy. Come and speak to him."

"Whath your name? My name's Joey. Her name's Lotthie. She's my thithter. I've got another thithter upstairs. I've got a bruvver. I've got a horse, only the mane's sticked on wiv' glue, and to-morrow I'm to have it back."

"He appears a very nice little Boy, with blue eyes and little square legs. How old are you, dear? Eight yesterday! I didn't think you were so much. But you're not too old to be kissed! He looks quite clean and I shall kiss him."

Which she did. The lock of hair got loose and tickled my right cheek. I can feel it now.

Did I go to school? No, I didn't. Did I know how to read? Yes, I did. Father said I was a regular dab at it. Who taught me? Why, Mother, o' coorse! She could read beautiful. What books did I read? The Boyble, and Mr. Capstick's Tracts, and "Robinson Crusoe." Which did I like best? The Boyble and "Robinson Crusoe." And of these two last which did I like best? I demurred, being afraid of ulterior consequences if I placed "Robinson Crusoe" above the Bible. I suggested my religious scruples in the ear that came down (with the hair off it) to meet my stuttered whispers, and the mouth that belonged to the ear broke into a laugh that filled the whole place, and engaged the curiosity of a carrot-scraping cook, who remarked that Miss Lossie was having her fun with the Man's Boy, to a bootblack and whistler, in a dim unexplored back-region. What was Miss Lossie a-laughin' right out like that about? Why, because the Man's Boy was afraid that, if he liked "Robinson Crusoe" better than the Bible, he would go to a place which Joseph knew very well he was not to say, as he did the other day before Company. But the Man's Boy really *did* like "Robinson Crusoe" best, didn't he? Well—he did—but chiefly because of a suspicion that though Mr. Capstick hadn't himself written the Bible, he had got himself worked into it surreptitiously since its first publication, and had given it a Capstickian flavour. And what did I say my name was? I said, "Joey, Miss;"—and Miss Lossie said, "Say it again, dear—I can't hear. Joey, don't howl when you jump! Jump, but don't howl."—For Master Joseph had invented a new form of riot which impeded communications. I gave my name again, and Miss Lossie said then there were a couple of Joeys. And I said, "Yes, please, Miss," to apologize for possible intrusion.

Then the Cook, who I believe must have been my Guardian Angel in disguise, pointed out that Miss Lossie's Pa was sure to be ever so long with the Man over the Drains, because Miss Lossie knew what her Pa was; so why shouldn't Miss Lossie take the Boy out in the garden and make him help gather the pears? So Miss Lossie did, one Joe in each hand.

There were plenty of Pears to pick. It must have been a good and unusually early crop. There were such crops in those days. —The gardener was picking as hard as he could on a ladder, and another ladder was occupied by a boy about my own age. But I said, "Law, Miss, I don't want no ladder," and had my jacket off and was up in the tree and picking in the twinkling of an eye. And the gardener remarked that I seemed a likely young chap.

We picked and picked in the sunshine and pelted the pears down on the lawn, because even if they hadn't been too hard to bruise on the soft grass, it wouldn't have mattered as they were to be stewed immediately.— Only I was to take care not to hit Miss Violet, who was reading a novel in the shadow on the lawn. Miss Violet was older than her sister, and may have been prettier. But I took no interest in her at all.

The boy who was picking was very close to me. We established Free-Masonic relations of offensive and defensive alliance against males of all ages. But he did justice to his social superiority by a certain assumption of patronage, calling me younker. He also disclaimed liability to pear-tree service, saying he was only doing it for a few minutes and was going away to cricket directly—obviously a more manly employment. He supposed (but I don't know why) I *didn't* play cricket. I said. "the Boys" allowed me to field out a bit, but never let me have an innings. I think he inferred that my standard of cricket was low, as he did not pursue the subject.

I heard in the remote distance a discussion of Drains, sometimes subterranean, sometimes in front of the house, sometimes as far off as the garden gates. My Father's voice husky and patronizing—Dr. Thorpe's voice with the superiority of Education, but deferring to the Judgment of a Practical Man. This discussion I thankfully foresaw would be interminable, that is to say, would require the intervention of some great force of Nature to stop it—for instance, lunch. So I picked pears in unspeakable happiness, keeping my eyes fixed on Miss Lossie down below, sitting on the lawn with her hands round her knees and Joey hanging on her shoulders. She also was engaged in an interminable discussion, with her sister, and of this I was unable to catch the purport, and only heard her words when they took the form of audible remonstrance to Joey, as for instance, "Joey, if you lick, Anne shall come and fetch you," or, "Joey, you awful child, you'll have all my hair down," or "Joey dear, don't kiss me so tight; you'll get stuck and never come undone."

But all good things have an end, and the end of my Paradise came with a sudden bell of a dictatorial sort and a "Good gracious, it's luncheon, and I'm not washed!" from Miss Lossie, just as we arrived at the end of our picking. I was afraid I shouldn't see her again, as she ran away so very quick to get washed. As I came down the tree I heard her sister say, "Well, all I say is, it's undignified," and she replied, "And all *I* say is, I shall do exactly whatever I please and consult nobody. So there!" After which more than American Declaration of Independence she ran into the house.

I found my Father and Dr. Thorpe at the front gate apparently on good terms (for which I was thankful, knowing my Father's combative disposition), but registering slight differences of opinion about a certain culvert, or barrel drain; concerning which the Doctor spoke with as decisive a certainty as if he had crawled up it. "I still think," said he, "that the fault is in the old barrel-drain." And my Father replied, "Deferrin' always respeckfly to you, Sir, and always subjick to your correction, I still hold as a Practical Man to my opinion—defective trappin'. But we will have a thorough examination as arranged on Monday."

I felt that my Father's position as a Metropolitan Builder was beginning to be established. And I was more afraid than ever that I shouldn't see Miss Lossie again, when she ran suddenly down the long flight of steps with a very large piece of plum cake in her hand for me. She was obviously, when washed, the most beautiful thing in heaven or earth. It was simply an indisputable axiom, to be accepted without question by a grateful Universe. "Where was the Boy? Oh, here! When was the Man coming to do the Drains? Oh, good-morning! Monday? Then you'll be sure to bring the Boy. You must make him bring the Boy, Papa."

Miss Lossie had addressed my Father directly, but she had this much of her Aunt in her that when it came to the actual substance of the communication to what my Father called a tradesman, it was most fitting to transmit it through an Agent. The Agent laughed and said, in reply to a tendency to ask leave, "Whatever my daughter likes. He's a good boy, I suppose, and doesn't break things." My Father enlarged upon the very high development of a capacity for not breaking things which not only I but all my forbears on both sides had attained. He was interrupted by the appearance of the silver-grey Aunt as a sort of Luncheon-Shepherd collecting her flock; and then Miss Lossie said, "Good-bye, little Boy! Come on Monday. The cake's new, so don't stuff it down or you'll swell up like *our* Joey." I was nursing a secret hope that I should be kissed again. But this, I suppose, was one of the things that would not have been dignified; so Miss Lossie merely took hold of my right hand (that had flung the bottle-end at Mr. Gunn), to put the cake in it, and vanished to lunch. The long front garden gate I supposed sympathized with me, for it refused to shut us out until my Father resolutely jumped the hasp into the latchet. Then the world became prosaic.

My Father lighted his pipe in the shelter of the gate-pier, and puffed at it in silence as we started home. "I'll give the little Nipper a lift if he's tired," said he. But the little Nipper wasn't tired, and shook his head for reply, his mouth being full of cake. The cake was new, but I may mention (in case the reader should feel anxious) that I did not swell up, but felt refreshed, and grateful for the citron. When I had finished it, and my Father had knocked the ash out of his pipe and blown through it, conversation ensued—

He.—"With respect to this here barrel-drain or culvert, I'm remarkin' that this here Dr. Thorpe never knew no such expressions till he borrowed 'em 'orf of me. Consequent, he's likely wrong—and there ain't no culvert, nor yet no drain of any description."

I.—"Miss Lossie's brother's name is Joey—the very little one."

He.—"It's more than 'arf likely it's only a lot of old stinkin' wells, and the nightmen pretendin' they'd emptied of 'em, and very far from being the case. But the public judges of the efficiency of the nightman by the quantity of brandy consoomed to keep him from faintin', and bein' in bed at the time cannot inspect."

I.—"Miss Lossie's big brother plays cricket. Miss Lossie's big sister reads. Miss Lossie's father's gardener is called Samuel."

He.—"In coorse in the manner o' speakin' cesspools is more wholesome, but then main shores and constant supply is good for trade, and that we ought to consider. The labourer is worthy of his hire, as Capstick says; so wherefore not give him all possible employment?"

I.—"Miss Lossie's Aunt's name is Isabella and she's deaf, but not very. Miss Lossie's father isn't a real Doctor—only pretence."

He.—"How the dickens does the young Nipper know that?"

My statement had recalled my Father from his savoury reverie on sewage, and I think it now presented itself to him for the first time that Dr. Thorpe did not belong to the Medical Profession. I was unable, and am, still, to say exactly how I knew it, or how I knew that Miss Isabella the Aunt was deaf but not very, and so forth. But I was convinced of it, and my Father on reflection appeared inclined to admit it, saying that p'r'aps Dr. Thorpe was a Libery Beggar and took Poopils. Perhaps he was.

We arrived home very late for one o'clock though rather early for three. Mr. Capstick had been on a visit, and was just taking his leave. My Father said, "Good-afternoon to *you*, Sir! Me and Mrs. Wance has been sayin' it was gettin' on for time for you to come round and have a Real Hidgeous Controversy." And Mr. Capstick replied that vain disputations were contrary to his liking, which was a fib on the part of the Rev. Benaiah. My Father said, however, he should look forward. And the Rev. departed, with benedictions, to my great satisfaction. I launched at once into the real business of life.

"I say, Mother, Miss Lossie she wanted for to know which I liked best, Mr. Capstick's Tracks or Robinson Crusoe."

"The pound and four ounces of beefsteaks is a-doin', I'm 'appy to smell," said my Father.

"I put it on the gridiron the minute I see you get past the Roebuck," said my Mother, who must have seen us coming some time before we reached the Roebuck. My Father commented and my Mother said she would have put it down for that matter as soon as ever she see us, only she wasn't going to have it done to a cinder while he was a-soakin'. It would have been just exactly ready only for my Father's 'abits. My Father said with a sigh that his Roebucking days were over, but he hoped there was something on the shelf. My Mother said there was enough to go round. I then felt that progress ought to be made with what I considered the Bill before the House, and cut in to the effect that Miss Lossie she laughed and told the Cook, and the Cook she said go in the garden and pick pears. And my Mother said, "Whatever is the child lecturin' about, with his Miss Lossie and

Cooks. Go along in and cut the bread, and don't cut yourself.' For cutting the bread at dinner was a valued prerogative of mine

My Father indicated a slight preliminary explanation. "The Nipper's been a-goin' into Society, he has," said he. He seemed to imply that *he* had been kept out of Society, which I felt sorry for—for I need not repeat how devoted I was to him. But it was merely his usual *façon-de-parler.* He always adopted the position of injury or grievance.

"Well, Joey dear, eat your dinner and don't choke yourself and then tell us all about Society."

Meanwhile my Father was enjoying a third and entirely different aspect of a revelation to be given out or retained—in the possibilities of human exasperation afforded by withholding it from persons desirous of benefiting. My Mother, however, understood his character and let him alone.

The beefsteak obligingly stood in its gravy on a dish on the rack with two handles that pulled out under the fire-grate, while my Mother climaxed the potatoes. "We'll have 'em all hot together," she said. So we had, but not for long—they disappeared so quick! So did a suet dumpling, and then at last I was free to pour out my treasure at my Mother's feet.

It took some time, for I did it all the slower for my anxiety to tell it all at once. This caused retrospection and correction. I was very particular about exactly where Miss Lossie had kissed me. And when my Mother kissed the place herself, I felt that my chubby cheek was a sort of connecting link between my Mother and Miss Lossie Thorpe, and was almost equivalent to an introduction. I suppose if one were to try and concoct rapture without alloy for a living creature, one could do no better than arrange that a child should meet an Angel, or what it thought an Angel and should go home and tell mother.

"Well, now, Vance," said my Mother, when at last I stopped gabbling and stuttering about Miss Lossie, "you don't seem to have anything to tell us."

"No gettin' in a word between these Miss Loocys," I understood him to say. "Here I've got to my second pipe, and it's nothin' but Miss Loocy, Miss Loocy, Miss Loocy."

"But you saw Miss Lossie yourself, Father," I said, suddenly plunging onto his knee, and threatening to begin again.—"Oh yes! He'd seen a tidy sort of larce in a lavender-coloured frock.' —I nodded violently.—"So now little nippers might sit quiet on their Fathers' knees and let their Mothers hear about Dr. Corpse's drains—well!—Thorpeses, then!"

"Nothin' much to do, I should say! Just proper attention to trappin' and not sending Niagarrer down the shores every five minutes to keep the 'ouse 'elthy, and they'll do well enough for another three year. But there ain't no sile, not even hereabouts where it's mostly gravel, that can be expected to swallow up all the water that an old lady with idears will empt' down 'em when the water supply is practically unrestricted"—(this came in almost with the literary force of a classical quotation)—"and a old lady has no other mortal emply'ment in life."—(It was Aunt Isabella, then, who was to blame for the flavour all through the basement, which my Father readily admitted the existence of.)—"But all I say is," he went on, "that if this here Dr. What's-his-name insists on my takin' out the ground in his front garden to 'unt for a shore that more like than not ain't there nor anywhere else, I'll do it fast enough, but it ain't my recommendation as a Practical Man, and I wash my 'ands of the Expenses. What I sticks to is stop the flushing and see to the traps."

"Well, but now, Vance dear," said my Mother, "you see you *do* know a *lot* about it!"

"Only just as much as a man is born with when he's lived among tradesmen all his life," said my Father, who seemed to be in some confusion about the period of life at which Birth occurs.

CHAPTER VI

SHOWS HOW MR. VANCE OBTAINED CAPITAL AND PLANT. ALSO HOW HE CREATED CONFIDENCE.

THE shock to my belief in my Father's infallibility occasioned by the miscarrying of the celebrated Smack was I suppose only skin-deep, for I for my part never had any doubt about his qualifications as a Builder. If I *had* had any latent mistrust of his powers it would surely have disappeared in the interval between our visit to Poplar Villa and the Monday following, when we were due there again for purposes of subterranean exploration. For I accompanied him on an expedition in search of Plant and Materials, about which there was some difficulty owing to his enterprise being so far insufficiently capitalized. I like this sesquipedalian way of saying one has no money. One has none, just the same, but it seems so much easier to bear one's lot!

My Father's genius rode triumphant over all obstacles. First we went into a yard where there were all sorts of Builders' Materials, old and new, on sale or hire. Now what would be actually wanted for his immediate purpose was obviously a peck, a spade, and a barrer. He said so, in fact, on the way. So I was surprised when he opened a negotiation for the hire of a very long ladder which, fastened against the blank side-wall of a house, overtook its chimney-pot and shot high up into the sky overhead. Mr. Gubbins, the yard-proprietor, pointed out that this ladder was almost a permanency—being of use as an announcement of the business to the four home-counties; and though of course it could be got down, it would run into Money. My Father observed that one had to be careful nowadays (this expression he said he had picked up from his grandfather—which seemed to annul its force), but pressed to know how much money it would run into. Mr. Gubbins named a figure which caused him to remark, in effect, that had he been quoting for Jacob's Ladder he couldn't have gone farther. The subject lapsed and the conversation became general. Mr. Gubbins told us that his son Benjamin was a blessing to his parents, and had only yesterday run up that very ladder away from his mother, who was going to give him what-for, and had refused to come down without guarantees that his trousers should remain undusted. "So we've had to lash up a scaffold-board agin it," said Mr. Gubbins, who chuckled a good deal at his wife's expense. "Not to spile it with nails," he added. For that ladder was evidently the apple of his eye.

My Father then, before going away, enquired how many loads of good stocks were available at short notice? He made a memorandum on this point, and appeared to have got all he wanted, when just as he was leaving he said in a most casual way that he had a small repairin' job down the road, and he would be sendin' a young man round Monday mornin' for a 'arf-bushel of grey lime and a few brick, only he wouldn't send the truck 'cos it made such a load for the young man to push, as he wanted him to bring a barrer, too, and he could just as easy put the lime and brick on the barrer, and run 'em round. I thought I saw suspicion in Mr. Gubbins's eye, but my Father was equal to the occasion, adding that he'd "got the address somewhere, had it only this minute. Dr. Thorpe's, Poplar Villa." Mr. Gubbins had better keep that card, and he himself was going into town this afternoon and would leave word for Dr. Thorpe to send another for Mr. G. to know the young man by. Mr. Gubbins knew my Father's place (at least my Father said he did), on the right, past the Roebuck.—And to my great impressment Mr. Gubbins actually said he knew it well. "I see your name up often, passing along that way," he said.

It was a most amazing thing how every one (for even our Dustman implied that it must have been there, though he hadn't seen it) accepted this board without question, and even in some cases professed to have read it carefully over and over again on our doorpost, while it was still forwarding the interests of the Mr. C. Dance, into whose possession it had come (according to my Father) through an error in the spelling. "In coorse," he said, "he was justified in using of it—seein' a Dee is not a Vee, put it how you may! But they might as well have done it right at first go-off, for all I see!" Anyhow, Mr. Gubbins seemed to be completely satisfied the moment it was mentioned, and didn't suggest the payment of a deposit, or any further form of security.

But this arrangement, though good as far as it went, only provided such Plant and Materials as can be got on hire at a Mr. Gubbins's. It did not include tools.

And this evidently occasioned my Father serious anxiety. I think he was even now proposing to himself a blank writing form with Christopher Vance, Builder, and his address at the top, and even the expression "Memorandum"! But he was most reluctant to impair the power these would give as a handle for Credit, by paying Cash for small purchases just as if he were insolvent.—"No, Joey," said he, "when a chap thinks you know he believes in your solvency, don't you ondeceive him by orfering him cash. Then he'll know you think he believes you insolvent, and never give a brass farden o' credit. 'Cos you wouldn't think any man would b'lieve you insolvent if you knowed you was in funds. Hay, Joey?"

I felt this might rank as a complicated mixture, though scarcely one of Mr. Capstick's. But I replied to my Father's last question that I had got the idear. I thought, however, that there being no cash to pay with might have something to do with my Father's objection to paying.

We were then working slowly down the main road, my hand in my Father's. The sun was thinking about setting, and hesitating to do so as it was really almost too fine an evening to go to bed. A band of men were just turning off the railway after a spell of overtime, and seemed to have taken umbrage at their employers. My Father entered into conversation, and the young man he addressed said, "Right you are, mate, it's always the way. One minute you're workin' ten hours overtime. Next minute cut down to nothing! Next minute overtime again worse than ever." He explained that in pursuance of this system two hundred were to be sacked off the job on Saturday. So the figures were figurative. My Father sympathized deeply, and assented to all the accusations levelled against Railway Contractors, though I am sure some of them could not have been universally true. He did this without echoing the "language" these young men called them, I think out of consideration for the Nipper. But I ought, in justice to my Father, to say that he always admitted transgression in respect of his use of bad language, and indeed drew a very sharp line as to how far he went. Perhaps the upper-middle class does not fully appreciate the nice distinctions that exist on this point in the lower-middle class in England. They are real, nevertheless.

Just as we were parting from the young man, my Father suggested that while they shared a pint he would have time to think of whether he couldn't find a small job for him to keep his 'and in.—I was glad it wasn't a quart, after experience.—It was shared, and my Father then revealed the thought he had had time for.

"You might look round at my job at Poplar Willer—Dr. Thorpe's—in the 'Igh Road to Town. Monday mornin', about eight. You might bring round a peck and a shovel." The young man explained that he hadn't got one by him—the railway contractors had provided their own. So my Father said, "Well, he didn't want him to have to come all the way down to his place past the Roebuck and then back, only for a peck and shovel—so let him see! Well, he might look in on the way at Nichollses, not Hee-phraim Nichollses, but Jack Nichollses along on the right—near the Fire-Ingins—you know him?" The young man did. It was quite wonderful how many people knew other people! "Well," said my Father, "you mention my name—Christopher Wance—along the road past the Roebuck, and I'll venture to say he'll accommodate you so far as a peck and a shovel."

And my Father paid honourably for the pint, and we started for home.

CHAPTER VII

CONCERNING A BARREL-DRAIN WHICH DID NOT EXIST. OF REPAIRS TO THE NURSERY CHIMNEY AND HOW JOE WENT UP IT. ALSO WHAT A GOOD WASHING HE HAD.

It is told of Calverley that he had a delight in jumping over walls if he didn't know what was on the other side. Jack Nicholls must have been like him, for he seemed to have conceded the peck and shovel almost without digesting the testimonials of his applicant.—"Never seen him—seen his Board many's the time," was the young man's report of Mr. Nicholls's half of the interview, when he met us at the gate of Poplar Villa on Monday.

"I told him it was all right," said the young man, whose name was Bill but nothing further, "and he said I could take 'em." And there they were, sure enough!

I hope you observe that Jack Nicholls accepted Bill's warrant for my Father, Bill having acquired status by tendering my Father's warrant for himself! It was like Baron Munchausen's descent from the Moon; when, having slipped down the rope as far as he could go, he made use of "the now useless upper half of the rope" to carry him a stage lower and so on till he reached the Earth.

The Libery Beggar was at breakfast, but would come out to speak to the Man before he retired into his Libery, or shell. I clearly saw that my Father's deference to Dr. Thorpe was the basest opportunism, and that he was not without a hope that an overweening assumption of Drain Lore might betray his employer into a disruption of the foundation of Poplar Villa in search for a non-existent barrel-drain. It showed (I thought) his knowledge of mankind that he took up again his position of respectful resistance to the Doctor's opinions. It established him as an unselfish protector of the latter from needless outlay, but at the same time exasperated his *amour propre,* and stimulated his self-confidence by opposition. Dr. Thorpe's will was my Father's Law—*that* it was needless for him to say! And this young man would start at once if the Doctor said the word. "But," said my Father, "if you ask me, as a Practical Man, my opinion is—*no shore!* And, if cesspools, I should advise the adjestment of the trappin', and keepin' back of the water, and very shortly the flaviour complained of will subside spontaneous." But Dr. Thorpe's back was up, and he insisted on penetrating the bowels of the earth. "I take all responsibility on my own shoulders, Mr. Vance," he said—"you do very rightly to try to protect me from all expenses that can be avoided, but in this case I prefer to incur some extra outlay to go to the bottom of the matter."

So my Father, who desired nothing better, assented with seeming reluctance to take up about six foot of ground on the semicircular carriage drive; which was sure, he said, to strike on the drain and at the same time avoid taking up the airey and disturbing too near the house. And at a signal from him, the young man, Bill, who had been standing with his hands open in front of him as if he had been telling his own fortune by Palmistry, spat suddenly upon them, and seizing a peck, or pick, began to work as though it was a siege, and these were the entrenchments. And then my Father said that if no wise ill-convenient he could attend now to that little matter in the Nursery while his young man got the bit of ground out.

I felt that my hour was coming now. The superiority of Miss Lossie to every earthly thing was certainly shown by the fact that she was a force that could make a small boy of eight glad to forsake the intoxicating delights of the taking out of ground without a regret. For Excavation, whether it be for shores, for treasure, or for papyri and mummies, is an absorbing and thrilling interest almost without a parallel. It is usually also harmless, and this cannot be said of Vivisection or War, or Gambling on the Stock Exchange. In this case if it had not been for expectation of seeing Miss Lossie, I should have hung lovingly over that hole watching the young man, Bill, putting his back into it, as my Father had told him to do. As it was, I was more than content to follow my Father up to the Nursery, carrying one or two minor tools that he had contrived to provide. He himself carried upstairs a 'arf a bag of Sto'rbridge clay, and a little board with a handle sticking straight out underneath. This was for wet clay.

Miss Lossie wasn't in the Nursery, and I was sorry.

"Will the Man make a mess?"—It was Miss Isabella, the silver-grey Aunt, who spoke.—And my Father replied, abasing himself duly, "There won't go any particular mess, Marm, not with taking out these few brick, but if such a thing was 'andy as a piece of canwas or box-cloth, for underfoot, why, perhaps we shouldn't be any the worse off in the end."

It took time to interpret this to Miss Isabella, whose deafness seemed to me to go beyond "not very." When success crowned the efforts of the Nurse, Anne, Miss Isabella said, "Well—you needn't shout,—I can hear,"—but sanctioned the box-cloth out of the lumber-room, only it must be shaken. It arrived in due course, and my Father proceeded to dislocate the register in order to get at the bricks that had fallen forward in the chimney above. He showed some amount of ill-temper because of the difficulty of doing this, and said that these here registers was always out of order, there was no doing anything with them! And a voice said, "That's a very common complaint against registers, Mr. Vance.—And here's the Boy! And he has such pretty blue eyes I should kiss him again, only he's such a little grubby Pigmuddle! But come and say good-morning, Master Vance. Because I suppose you *are* Master Vance." I looked at my Father to see if I was, not precisely knowing, and he gave a qualified assent. "Wance—christened Joey—p'r'aps I should say Joseph."—And Miss Lossie said of course I wasn't christened Master! "He's as black as any Sweep," she went on; and I shuddered as memory rankled, "and he's coming all off on my hands," she added.

"You go a mile off, Joey, till you've done with the soot, and then you shall be washed and come quite close to, as Anne says, and see Picture Books." And the other Joey, who of course was hooked on to Miss Lossie, added, "Wiv' Sips, and sailors falling out of them by ax'nent, and helephants, and Fenchmen bein' killed on ballicades."—Of course I didn't know what barricades were. But I knew that Foreigners had been going on in their usual benighted way, and looked forward to pictures of them.

Pictures, however, and everything else were impossible while this banging went on. This was the cutting out of some brick to get a good key, my Father said. We shouldn't be a minute, he said—nor were we. We were about fifteen. But the Public was grateful when we did stop; and said through Anne, the nurse, as a mouthpiece, that it was one good job *that* was done, and then graciously attended to my Father's request for a pail of water. "There won't be no more noise, not to call noise," said he, "cleanin' off these few brick for to go back where they come from, bein' the mortar's perished with the heat. On which accounts I say a little St'orbridge, though a few pence more at the first go-off, is an economy in the end, put it how you may." And my Father mixed his St'orbridge on the hearthstone, and dwelt on the great advantages of economy and foresight in the Building line.

A crisis occurred, however, before the job was completed and the register replaced. The topmost two bricks, which had fallen forward and checked the draught, had, of course, come out very easily. But for a man with very broad shoulders to get far enough up the chimney to replace them was another matter. My Father had struggled gallantly with his difficulties so far, and really had got almost as black as Mr. Peter Gunn, but as he said one had to dror' a line. At this point I struck in, suggesting that my Father should h'iste me up the chimbley; should then just shove a little St'orbridge on each brick; should then shove it up to me, who would then make nothing of shoving of it into its place. My Father said, "Sharp Nipper! So you can! We'll just orfer 'em in first, a brick at a time." And he was just going to hoist me up as proposed when he was pounced upon by an unforeseen Philanthropist in the person of Miss Isabella, who interdicted the employment of Climbing Boys. "No, my dear Randall," she said to the Doctor, who came in at this moment to inspect progress. "Not in this house while I am here! I will *not* permit it."

The Doctor.—"Permit what, Isabella?"

She.—"Sweep's Climbing Boys. The Man wishes to put his son up the Chimney——"

The Doctor.—"Hm-m-m-m!"

My Father.—"Asking your pardon for interruptin' you, Marm, by no means without yours and the Doctor's consent, giv' freely, though my own son——"

The Doctor.—"Can't you manage without, Vance?"

F.—"Well, Sir, you see, it's just like this. It's the matter of two or three brick, or maybe two brick and a bat, or two brick and a bat and a closure——"

Dr. T.—"In fact of very little work?"

F.—"Precisely as you put it, Sir. And bein' as I myself am rather big, and liable to jam in the narrer space, this here little Nipper (a name I call him by, Marm) says, says he, 'You 'and me in the bricks, and I'll shove 'em in their places,' he says. And I was a-thinking of it over like when this good lady come in."——

Miss I.—"No!—The Man was *not*. The Man was going to *put* the Boy *up* the chimney."

Miss L. (coming in with an armful of books).—"What's the row, Aunty? Of course the Boy mustn't go up the chimney! He's black enough already. The idea!"

Dr. T.—"How far up the chimney would he be, Vance?"

Miss L.—"Yes—Joey—t'other Joey! How far up would you be?"

Myself.—"Please, Miss Lossie, only this far!" And before I ould be stopped I was up standing on the hob with my head in the flue. I heard Miss Lossie's musical laugh ring out all over the place, and Anne say I was a likely young chap, as the gardener had said. They all seemed agreed about my probability.

"Anyhow, my dear Isabella," said the Doctor, "The Boy *is* up the chimney now, and perhaps we had better accept the situation. Unless you are prepared to pull him down by the legs——"

Aunt Isabella said she had been set at naught, but had done her duty. Miss Lossie said Anne was to wash the Boy carefully when he came out, as he was then to come and look at pictures with their Joey. Their Joey thrust in a stipulation that these pictures should include Sips on Fire, and Sips on Wocks, and other tragic or murderous incidents.

I was very black, no doubt, when I emerged from that flue, though Anne the Nurse's estimate of the quantity of soap required was absurd. She said a bar of yellow soap wouldn't be enough. Anne was a bony woman of strong character, for she declined to let me wash myself, and soaped me with a vigour far beyond any experience of washing I had ever had up to that date. My method had been Catlicking, she said. And, indeed, I do think that the practice of applying to the skin a very small quantity of soap as a lubricant, and then polishing with violence, is not so effective as the creation of a good Larther, and coaxing it round, greasy-like! I borrow some of my description from Anne. Of course in the polishing business economy is attained, and *The Soap,* by which phrase I indicate the piece of soap current in one family or community, goes a deal farther. One has to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth if one is going to admit the expenditure on one small boy of the amount of soap Anne bestowed upon me.

A short colloquy with Miss Lossie in an adjoining room, while I was towelling myself, led to the reappearance of Anne with a beautiful blue woollen shirt, which Master Oliver, it would seem, had outgrown, and which it would be four or five years before Master Joey was big enough. I prefer to adhere to Anne's syntax. I put this on gratefully; but carefully rolled up my own and stuffed it in my coat pocket, that Dr. Thorpe's household should not be embarrassed by it.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW JOEY HAD MISS LOSSIE'S ARM ROUND HIM WHILE HE SAW BOOKS. MISS VIOLET CORRECTS HER SISTER. MISS LOSSIE'S TONGUE. HOW JOE WENT HOME, AND HEARD FROM PORKY OF THE BEAK. HOW MR. VANCE HAS ANOTHER JOB, ALL DUE TO THE MAGIC BOARD.

THE choking feeling which, do what I may, will come into my throat as I think of the intensely happy hour I then passed looking at pictures, quite close to Miss Lossie, with the other Joe on her other side, only interferes with my narrative; and the reader, if young, will not understand it. I have only to wait a minute and it disappears, and with it all my present surroundings as I write, and all the long half-century between, and I am back again in the Nursery at Poplar Villa, with the September sun streaming through the windows, and Miss Violet reading one of the books Miss Lossie had got at Mudie's in Southampton Row when she went to town yesterday afternoon. And Master Joseph chattering rapid and predominant commentaries on the pictures before us, and life in general. And then it all becomes so real that when the Water comes in (as it does suddenly in my recollection) I can almost absolutely hear through the open door the gasping and gurgling of that practically unlimited supply before it settles down to a continuous reproachful roar. And then my memory of Anne shuts my memory of that door, by request, to keep that awful noise out, and the memory of the roar becomes a memory of a murmur.

"I wants first to see Sips on Fire," said the other Joey. "No, I dothn't—I wants first to see black men pellishing."

"Now which do you *really* want, you awful boy?"

"Athk the other Boy, that Boy there," pointing at me as if I was on the horizon.

"Well, Joey Vance, which shall we have first? Ships on Fire, or Black men perishing by Thousands?"

I said Ships on Fire. They were produced and gave great satisfaction. But Master Joseph required, in addition to the picture, a consecutive narrative of the Battle of Trafalgar, which had to coincide exactly with previous narratives. If it did not, he immediately pounced, with "You thed Captain Toobridge before" or "You thed shooted wiv' cannonballs before" or some such correction. However, we got through the story in time, and left Nelson dying on the quarter-deck. But by the time this was done, Master Joseph had ceased to long for Black Men Perishing by Thousands, which I had anticipated with pleasure, and demanded the Barricades of Paris. However, it didn't much matter, where all was too good to be true, especially Miss Lossie.

This young lady contrived to keep up a conversation with her sister in spite of the severe demands of Master Joseph and myself. And this conversation seemed to be divisible into two distinct halves, the one having an absolutely public character and the other consisting of subordinated telegraphic remarks of a personal sort.

I could show this clearly in printing by the introduction of two different types. But as I have not any intention of availing myself of that resource, I will give the conversation consecutively as nearly as I recollect it—

V.—"Well!—Aunt may say what she likes, but I do *not* see, and never shall see, how people are to drive up to the door on Thursday if the whole place is to be dug up for drains.—Your hair's coming down—stick it up with this."

L.—"Well, but Joey Vance's Papa is going to attend to that. Thankee, dear, you're a good little sister at times, though snappy. Isn't he, t'other Joey?"

Me.—"Yes—Miss Lossie."

L.—"And you know, Pa isn't a downright fool. Besides, how can it matter to you, when you say you won't come downstairs?"

V.—"If those odious Shuckford Smiths are coming, you know perfectly well I shan't.—As if you didn't know what Miss Shuckford Smith's half-sister called you! But even if Pa was the very cleverest F. R. S. of the whole lot, I don't see how carriages *could* drive up to the door with all the Drains up——"

L.—"They won't have to, Vicey dear! What *did* Miss Shuckford Smith's half-sister call me? Because you know there's to be nothing serious done to the drains till we go to Herne Bay."

V.—"Anyhow, Lossie dear, you may talk till you're hoarse, but every one knows what Papa is, and that he's perfectly capable of making the whole front garden into holes and heaps. A Piece of Goods! You know you knew that as well as I did——"

L.—"Yes—Joey darling—I'll draw you a very fat man being shooted. I don't see that it signifies if she *did* call me a Piece of Goods——"

V.—"Yes—but what becomes of one's dignity, I should like to know, if one goes downstairs and speaks to the family after Miss Shuckford Smith's or anybody's half-sister has called one's sister a Piece of Goods. And as for Herne Bay, detestable place, I hope we shall go somewhere else. Not really that it much matters, for wherever we go I suppose you'll go pounding and floundering about without your sunshade and getting pitch-black all over."

Miss Violet gave for a minute a closer attention to the book from Mudie's which she had been more or less reading the whole time. But she was not long in abeyance. She suddenly unmasked a Battery, the ammunition of which may be said to have been provided in her last remark.

"Anyhow," she said, "it's to be hoped you don't mean to go about with your tongue hanging out like a little dog. There's the Bell!"

There it certainly was—and the hour was over! I had paid very little attention to the Pictures, for I scarcely took my eyes off Miss Lossie. It had been decreed that I should have plenty to eat in the kitchen; so I adjourned with Anne.

I must not forget to explain about the little dog. Miss Lossie, in the effort of artistic creation she had been called on for, had certainly made her tongue visible, but only as a small kitten sometimes does, showing a little red spot between closed lips. She paid no attention to her sister's gun-practice, and went on putting in additional military men to shoot the very fat man. But Master Joey took up the matter, and put the tongue back, and pinched the lips over it with his fat little fingers. And Miss Lossie kissed him a good deal, and said, "You little Ducky."—Now *I* thought his conduct presumptuous and ruffianly.

I suppose I was very hungry after all my bricklaying exertions and unaccustomed ablutions and excitements; for the only two things I remember are the dinner itself and a report that came from the Dining-Room that Miss Violet had said that she should go and eat her lunch in the nursery, if they were going to talk about drains all dinner time. Our informant, the House-Parlourmaid, hoped she didn't expect her to carry the pudding upstairs and bring it down again for other people's second helpings afterwards, that was all! I felt the name of this young woman's office was oppressively long. However, her own was Betsy, and that made up for it.

I had been very silent throughout, merely secreting plums of event to be reproduced for my Mother later—and of course devouring Miss Lossie, whose left hand went round my head at intervals and pinched my left cheek; rather I thought to the disgust o Miss Violet. Did I, I wonder, actually hear the expressio “vulgar little boy,” or was it some wandering brain-wave? No—I am afraid Miss Violet *did* call me a vulgar little boy.

I rejoined my Father in the front garden after this experience and my Father said he’d been wondering what had become of the Nipper. I replied, “Oy say, Father, oy got such a Fizzing new shirt. Miss Lossie she said give me one of Master Oliver’s.” H hoped I had said thankee, as dooty bound; and I nodded my head rapidly with my lips tight shut, which was rather a habit of mine. He then distinguished that such beautiful clean young Masters wasn’t for the likes of him and William (normally Bill), and drains was drains all the world over, while on the other hand clean shirts were clean shirts; and that in order to keep their spheres of influence separate, young Nippers might just as well cut off home to their Mothers, and tell them that their Fathers would be ’arf-an-hour late to tea.

William said, “Right you are, Master,” and resumed work, which now appeared to be filling in the six foot of ground which had been taken out in the morning. I inferred that my Father had been right about the culvert or barrel-drain, and that Dr. Thorpe would have to pay for being satisfied of its non-existence.

My Father was more than half-an-hour late to tea—more than an hour and a half; and I was not sorry, as it gave me more time to place the subject of Miss Lossie in all possible lights before my Mother. It also gave margin for an interview with Porky Owls, whom I had scarcely seen since the day at the Police-Court. This interview took the form of a game at Peg-in-the-Ring; a glorious game when you’ve got a piece of soft whip-cord, well wore but not wore out. The nickname of Porky, by the way, originated in this game, its bearer having been “christened” by it after the pieces of Bacon or split tops which are the coveted prizes of the players. Porky’s pockets always teemed with them. He was a great Master and always gave me odds, usually winning back his own Bacon, and some of mine as well. On this occasion the conversation went naturally back to the Police-Court, where Porky had contrived to insert himself to study Mankind, and provide himself with gossip, of which indeed his mind was as full as his pockets were of Bacon.

“I heard that Beak talking about you,” said he, “an’ he giv’ out that he b’lieved all you said, only he warn’t going to have it Evidence, ’cos he warn’t sweet on Gunn, and provocation might have ensoo’d and then it might have got him off being sent for trial and hanged for manslaughter if your Guv'nor was to kick up. Accordin' as the Inquest."

Down went Porky's top with a whizz, and striking with deadly accuracy in the little heap of Bacon in the centre of the ring, sent most of it flying outside the circumference. When he had recovered his winnings he resumed the Magistrate.

"'Cos, o' coorse—he says—the Coroner's inquest may say Gunn done it, or they may find a werdict to the effeck that the Prisoner was killed in a Prize Fight and there was no means o' knowin' how he came by his end. But anyhow, he says, the Boy's Evidence goes to prove provocation of an obstrusive nature on Vance's part, and when a boy says he'll go to heaven for telling lies, he says, why o' coorse you reject his Evidence, no matter how much you believe it. So if it goes to trial, he says, I hope they'll swaller down the wink I tipped 'em, and reject the Boy's Evidence. But he was a most truthful little Boy, he says, and very intelligent.—My turn!" And down came the top again. "Arter the Court this was, and he was a-goin' out to lunch with a loydy, and I overheared their conversation at the cabstang while the clorths was took off."

As soon as Porky had won all my Bacon, I returned home to my Mother and found my Father wasn't quite home yet. She suggested that I should run up the road to head him off from the Roebuck, which I did, but found he had already passed it; and though he claimed to be morally entitled to at least half-a-pint for resisting temptation, he didn't go back to get it. Indeed, the change in my Father—obviously the result of that Magic Board—was most remarkable. It stimulated a healthy self-respect, not to say an inflated egotism. As we came up to the door he looked at it with intense satisfaction;—"C. Vance, Builder—Repairs," said he, "Hay, Joey?" and then murmured reflectively to himself, "Drains promptly attended to."

"Risin' in life we are," said my Mother, as she made the tea. "Here's Joey got a Young Lady gives him new shirts, and as foı you, Wance, you've ackchly got a job."

"Two jobs," said my Father, briefly.

"What—*another* job!" cried my Mother. "You never mean that, Vance?"

"I said *two* jobs," said my Father. "When you've got one job, if you're a-goin' to make it up to two, you'll have to pervide another. You'll find I ain't mistaken! And I ain't neither, unless I'm very much mistook. 'Cos, you count 'em off on your fingers, Joey! There's this here little job I've in 'and for your

Miss Lorcy's Papa, Dr. Whatever-you-choose-to-call-him. Well! that's one, ain't it? Count him on your fingers.—One!"

M.—"Well, now, Vance, do go along with your chaff, and tell us right off——"

F.—"I'm a-tellin' of you right off. You've got him, Joey, have you? Wery good. Then there's this here other job, round behind the School-House. He's *two*. Got him?"

M.—"Now whoever would have thought, to see you come in at that there door, that you had *three* Building jobs. And your Board not up a month!"

F.—"Sorry to disappoint you, Mrs. Wance," and here my Father's peculiar manner became perceptible. "How many have you counted up to, Joey?"

Me.—"Two——"

F.—"Two I sticks to! And a wery nice number in itself though not so large as might be. And unreasonable, I says, to ask for more. So now, Mrs. Wance!"

And my Father, having developed the manner I cannot describe, burst into a genial laugh and spoke through his nose. His little ruse having entrapped his victim, his good-humour became jovial. "Where did I say this here job was? Up behind the School-'us, I said, and I believe it is—but I haven't seen it myself." And my Father, having sufficiently stimulated our curiosity, suddenly retired behind an impenetrable screen of secrecy; but was, I think, a little taken aback when my Mother left him there and went back to Poplar Villa. What was it wrong with them drains, after all?

My Father was, I am convinced at this time, practising imposture on my Mother as a lay-figure with a view to more mature practice later on The Life. So he almost went through the pretence of thinking a minute, about which small job my mother referred to, before replying—

"Them Drains at Popular Willer? O' coorse as I said! *No Shore!* This here good Gentleman he's so wery wise, he is, and no respect for Experience, he hasn't—and then it's gettin' 'arf the front garden up, and I'd told 'im! All the same, this I will say, that his behaviour in admitting himself wrong is quite the Gentleman, and liberal amends! 'Mr. Wance,' says he, 'I see that I was mistaken and you were perfectly right.' And then he says what did I recommend? And of course I says the underground arrangements (as I calls 'em for to avoid the old Lady goin' into Convulsions) would probly be under the lawn, and could be found by piercing with a p'inter-rod, and avoid entrenchments on the

Doctor's porket. And my young man on the job, William, he agrees with me. And the old lady, she weeps, she does, and says they're livin' over a Plague-Pit, and the only wonder is they haven't all got Asiatic Cholera and Typhus. And I says to her, 'You're a rare lot safer, Marm, over these here Plague-Pits than you would be if they was to connect you with the Main Shore in the road.' And she says, oh she do hope the Man is right, but oh she do wish dear Randall you'd never taken the house on a twenty-one years' lease. But they must give notice at the end of the first seven, that was flat. And Dr. T. he says then there was still four years of peace and quiet."

"But, Vance dear, see what a lot you do know! Who'd ever have thought of p'inter-rods?"

"Well, my dear, let us give credit where credit is due! William (the young man I mentioned as working on that job) is dooly entitled to credit, as having mentioned a p'inter-rod to me afore I happened to mention it to Dr. T. as in coorse I should have done. Let us hope that William may be long spared to do sim'lar." My Father appeared to finish his cup of tea in honour of his sentiment. "I've squared it up with Dr. T.," he continued, "that so soon as the family is gone to 'Urn Bay the ground shall be opened and the ree-ceptacles emptied of their n'isome contents, meanwhile stip'lating that when he ketches that old party 'oldin' like Grim Death onto 'andles that sends cataracks of water down, he shall just collar hold of her and put her under restraint as a loonatic. As to the rest, it's a plumber's job, and I shall arrange to have it done. 'Enderson in the 'Orpington Road, or Packleses niece's 'usband over Clapham way—either o' them 'll make a job of it."

I think I have given sufficient detail of my Father's first exploit in the Building line to indicate the reasons of his subsequent success. He was really very shrewd, and had a keen perception of the sort of wisdom shown by the Brave Little Tailor in the German child's story, who sits in the branches while the Giant carries the tree, and the moment he stops jumps down and pretends he has been working equally hard. In all cases, the actual work was done by William, or by Henderson's in the Orpington Road, or by Mrs. Packleses niece-by-marriage's husband, or some similar ally. He always contrived to beg off paying the Giants till his employers settled the accounts, and for a long time was most discreet about overcharges—actually taking Dr. Thorpe into his confidence and showing him quite truthfully that seven and a half per cent. was the outside commission that he received on the total, and then deducting two and a half per cent. for a cash settlement. Dr. Thorpe, however, refused to make this reduction, saying that he did not see why he should filch Mr. Vance's just earnings as a bribe to pay his debts honourably. But Dr. Thorpe was not a Man of Business.

It must have cost my Father almost as great an effort to be thus abstemious as it did to pass the Roebuck unvisited. He managed both somehow, and job followed job with surprising rapidity. And every day as he came home to Stallwood's Cottages he looked with placidity at the great Board, and murmured through its impressive contents, nodding slowly at the punctuations. And well he might, for the Board had done it all!

I wonder whether C. Dance, whoever he was, fell away and perished neglected after the disappearance of his Board!

CHAPTER IX

HOW JOEY PAID ANOTHER VISIT TO POPLAR VILLA, AND HOW HE SHOCKED MISS VIOLET. HOW HE WENT UP INTO THE LIBRARY AND SAT ON DR. THORPE'S KNEE AND DID EUCLID. HOW HE WEPT ABOUT MISS LOSSIE. HOW DR. T. OFFERED HIM AN EDUCATION. AND OF THE SAD COLLAPSE OF PETER GUNN, TESTE PORKY OWLS.

I RESUME my recollections of Poplar Villa during the short interval before the family's departure for Herne Bay, where they went in spite of the lamentations of Miss Violet.

For when I made my appearance one morning by a special appointment of Miss Lossie's, the very first thing I heard was this young martyr's resignation coming into the breakfast room through the conservatory, which was on the way into the garden.

Master Joseph was on the breakfast table on his stomach, drawing an assassination, and saturating his lead pencil injudiciously. He descended suddenly when he saw me, bringing the tablecloth with him, and exclaiming, "The Boy ith to be took staight to Lothie and no nonthenth," proceeded to push me from behind, as though I had been a perambulator, into the back garden. Looking back now through my exact recollection of his words, I conjecture with their help a previous interview of the two sisters in which the elder had expressed a hope that at least I should have to wait outside a little (for discipline), and the younger had driven her coach and six through it with destructive energy.

Being pushed into the back garden by my namesake, I found Miss Lossie turning the practically unlimited supply of water on to the flower-beds; while her sister in a garden chair under a parasol, and reading as usual a Novel, was also denouncing Herne Bay and complaining of the absence of sympathy for herself in an unfeeling world. I was struck by the likeness to Mrs. Packles. But I did feel that the latter had the better right to complain, contrasting in my own mind the difference between life at the Wash-tub in an atmosphere of soapy steam, and life at Poplar Villa tainted only by effluvia which demanded the nose of an Expert to detect them.

"And you know perfectly well the weather will be quite fine and smooth till we pass the Nore—it always is! And then we shall all have to go down and be sick in the cabin, except you and Joey. And I declare I won't! If I get drenched through to the skin, I'll stop on deck—I declare I will."

L.—"Very well, dear, stop on deck. Here's Joey Vance Have you ever been at sea, Joey Vance?"

Me.—"Yes, Miss Lossie, please! My Father took me down the river in the penny Paddle-Wheel Boat. And when the chimbley came right down on deck under the Bridges I wasn't frightened. O such a lot of black smoke! And then wunst there was a Boy taller than me stood just under where the chimbley came down, and it came on his head, and——"

V.—"Do stop that Boy saying *wunst,* and make him say *once* I suppose that's not impossible——"

L.—"Say *once,* Joey Vance."

Me.—"Once" (very clearly and decisively).

V.—"You see he can do it perfectly, if he chooses. Only of course you encourage him in everything——"

L.—"How's the book getting on, Vicey dear? And what happened to the boy, Joey Vance?"

Me.—"Him what was taller than me—heaps he was—and the chimbley came down a awful crack, and they picked him up and said it was an accident. And wunst the chimbley would not go back——"

V.—"There's that Boy saying *wunst* again, and it gets on my nerves. I wish you wouldn't."

L.—"It isn't me, dear! Was the boy killed, Joey?"

Me.—"Oh yes, it was an accident. But please, Miss Lossie, I thought I was only to say *once* wunst, and done with it!"

Miss Lossie's laugh had the most infectious character. This time it caught on in the greenhouse among some canaries, and they sang without stopping a long time on end. It also started Betsy singing "Mary Blane," in the drawing-room, where she was dusting the ornaments.

L.—"Poor little Boy! Was he really killed? Yes, Joey Vance—say *once* always, won't you, dear, for my sake?"

I said of *course,* Miss Lossie! And Master Joey, I suppose feeling that a practical illustration would be useful, forthwith began, "Wunth, wunth, wunth, wunth, wunth," and had to be stopped. "Though really, Joey ducky," said Miss Lossie, "I shall have to find a new way of stopping your jaw. You do splutter in the moistest way, right into one's mouth."

V.—"Disgusting child!"

Me.—"And next day after that, Miss Lossie, the Wasp blowed up and all her Engine Bilers and every soul perished!"

Master J.—"By fousands?"

L.—"I remember! The Wasp was the name of the boat. How shocking! And you and your Father might have been on board——"

I.—"But we wasn't!—And Mr. Capstick said that we should rejoice when we reflected that all them Souls was hurled into eternity and they might have been me and my Father——"(sensation).

V.—"If this child is going on with his dreadful dissenting Little Bethel rubbish, I shall go indoors for one. And I do think, Lossie, you might check him a little instead of rolling on the grass with that shocking child, with his unendurable legs, and splitting with laughter."

Miss Lossie recovered herself slowly on to her knees, and released her long eyelashes from hairdrift, which she patted into its place, and wiped her eyes with her wrists *en passant*. She then settled down on the lawn with her hands round her knees. I can see the hair-bracelet she had on one wrist now.

L.—"Sit on my skirts, Joey ducky, and be quiet! Yes, they perished by fousands. But, t'other Joey, who is Mr. Capstick?"

V.—"*Then* I shall go in!"

L.—"Cut away, Vicey dear! But who is he, Joey Vance?"

Me.—"The Minister of the Lord——" For, indeed, I really believed he was *par excellence* THE Minister, and that others might have been dismissed, or might be waiting for their portfolios, but that, as a matter of fact, the Rev. Capstick was the only one at present.

V.—"Very well, then, Lossie! I see you really want me to go in, and I'll go!"

L.—"No—no—Vicey dear! She shan't go in, she shan't! You'll tell me all about Mr. Capstick some other time, won't you, Joey Vance?"

Me.—"Yes—Miss Lossie!" So an armistice was arranged, and Miss Violet consented to remain out on condition that religious subjects should be tabooed.

I wonder how young Christians of Miss Violet's sensibilities managed to scrat on in the first century! It must have been trying.

Miss Lossie, however, having conceded the point, honourably adhered to secular subjects. Under catechism, I showed myself lamentably ill-informed. I had not been to the Zoological Gardens, nor to the British Museum, nor to St. Paul's. I need not say that the last only came in in its secular capacity, as a sight. But then I knew, and was proud to know, a Boy who had been in the Thames Tunnel. This was Gummy Harbuttle. And Miss Lossie said good gracious what a name for a human boy to have! I explained that the name Gummy was short for Charles Augustus. Never having known it in any other capacity, it seemed to me to contain the essence of Charles Augustus in two syllables. I was pleased when Miss Lossie said neither she nor the other Joey had been in the Thames Tunnel, as my acquaintance with a boy who had been there clearly improved my social status. The introduction of the Thames Tunnel, however, proved a disturbing element, for Master Joey demanded to be taken there at once. He made a grievance of this demand not being complied with; and was only pacified by a concession, which, as it turned out, was one which had a great influence on my own future. For the sop thrown to Master Joseph was that he should be permitted to go up into his Father's library, and play at his Father's foot-warmer being a boat under the table. He stipulated also that the Boy should take him up, and no one else.

He carried all his points, triumphantly directing me to the door of his Father's library; bursting it open with—"I with to play at a Man in a Boat under the table, and I witheth to have the paper-knife to row wiv'. And the Boy is to wait."

"And that's the Boy!" said Dr. Thorpe. "Is your Father here, my Boy? Oh no, he wasn't to come yet, I remember. Let's have a look at *you!* If I am to be disturbed by young Monkeys, I may as well be disturbed outright. Can you read, old chap?"

Me.—"Yes, Sir, please! At least, I can read the Bible and 'Robinson Crusoe' rather slowly, and Mr. Capstick's Tracks very slow indeed because of——" I was hesitating to find a word that would describe Jer. xv. 116 or Rev. lx. 12, when the Doctor remarked that he had got a book there, and if I was to sit on his knee he would see which could read it through the fastest. So I sat on his knee. And the book was Euclid, and the Doctor nearly put it by, because the only legible bits without A's and B's were in writing-hand. But I stopped him because, I said, there was lots like it in Mr. Capstick's Tracks (which, indeed, was the case —as the author, in order to drive home his damnation to the sinner, resorted to all sorts of printer's fonts); and I actually read the words "equilateral" and "equiangular"—slowly, certainly, but without assistance. Then I was seized with the thirst of knowledge and wanted to know what they meant. The colloquy that follows is very nearly if not quite correct.

Dr. T.—"Equilateral is when all those three are the same" (pointing to the sides). "And equiangular is when all *those* three are the same" (putting a line across each angle).

Me.—"I see. When they're all o' one sharpness. Then when it's E-qui-lateral it's E-qui-angular——"

He.—"How do you know that?"

Me.—"Why, of course! Because if it wasn't E-qui-angular it wouldn't be E-qui-lateral. There would be a right side up. And there ain't any right side up, because it's the same all round——"

He.—"Let's try and draw one for ourselves. How shall we do it now?"

Me.—"I could drore it on the ground beautiful with my pegtop string. If me and Gummy——"

He.—"Who's he? However, never mind!"

Me.—"If me and Gummy was to toyk our two strings of a length, and dror' two rings just that length apart, no more nor no less, and then jine up the middles with the crossin' of the rings—why, of course there we should be!"

He.—"I wonder if Euclid went on in this way when he was a little boy."

Me.—"Here it is drored!" (pouncing on the First Proposition). "But what have they wrote letters at the corners for?"

Miss Lossie (coming in).—"To puzzle little boys! *You* don't want 'em, Joey Vance, do you?"

Me (thoughtfully).—"Of course me and Gummy could put the letters on afterwards, if they was wanted? His Father done my Father's signboard." I mentioned this to show that professional assistance would be forthcoming.

Dr. T.—"*That* would be the very thing! You don't mean that it's lunch already, Lossie? Your little friend and I were so interested we never heard the bell——"

L.—"Yes, and we shall catch it again from Aunty. Where's that child? He's so quiet he must be in mischief——"

He was. He was unpicking the seam in the side of the boat with the paper-knife.

If I were obliged to state on oath how much of the foregoing is absolutely and literally true, I am afraid I should have to reply very little indeed. For remember, it is fifty years ago! But the *whole* of the remainder is so *very* nearly true. It is the fact, no doubt, that I have to decipher a palimpsest; but then I wrote the original myself, or was myself the parchment. Choose whichever metaphor fits best.

Suppose now I confine myself for a while to rigid recollection only, and tell the exact truth. Let Poplar Villa in detail vanish into the past, with Master Joey resisting execution in respect of the paper-knife; myself receiving instruction from Miss Lossie as to what dinner I should requisition from Anne; the Doctor hurrying off to ablutions, and a background of a second luncheon-bell and the voice of Aunt Isa, which could scarcely have thrilled with greater tragedy had the second luncheon-bell been the tocsin, and the family summoned to battle with fire and flood.

I absolutely remember Miss Lossie kissing me to say good-bye at the gate, and her sister taking some exception thereto. I could fill out this recollection by saying that her words were "If you can kiss anything so dinnery," but I am not sure enough of them.

I can remember, but dimly, coming back along the dusty main road. Then being at home with my Mother, and crying in my sleeve in a corner because Miss Lossie was going away, and six weeks seemed too long to bear.

I can remember that Henderson's in the Orpington Road came and complained bitterly that my Father, just to save a few shillins should 'and over a job to Packles's Niece's husband—and him known Mr. Vance in the Buildin' trade all these years! This, I take it, was another tribute to the Board. Really if it had been a Board with Minutes and Deputations it could not have been more influential.

I can remember my Father saying to my Mother that she was to go over to Dr. Thorpe at the Willer to talk about the young Nipper. "That 'll suit your Book, hay, Joey?" And I thought he was referring to the first Book of Euclid.

I can remember sitting on the gate-posts looking along the road to see my Mother come back, and the taste of the brazil nuts I was eating at the time. And I remember the joyous hug that implied that something delightful had happened. And that the *something* turned out to be that Dr. T. was going to send me to a proper school at his own expense. And that there (so a message to myself ran) I should learn all about the nearest approach to Equilateral and Equiangular triangles that my Mother's powers of pronunciation could compass.

I can remember, very dimly indeed, that Mr. Capstick endeavoured to intervene on behalf of a miserable little institution that he called his Schools. But he had scarcely succeeded in procuring my attendance as a pupil in previous times, and now he was nowhere.

Before I absolutely quit this period of my life I will give a filled-out recollection of another of Porky Owls's gossiping reports. It related to Peter Gunn, the Sweep, and told how he had fallen a victim to Nemesis.

"I seen that sportin' character agin wot I told you seen your dad fight Mr. Gunn. Rec'lect? Well, I heared him talking to a Hom'libus. So I stops and listens. And he says 'Pore Gunn,' he says, 'pore Peter!' And he makes b'lieve he was a-cryin'! Then I gets a little nearer. And the Driver he says, 'I thought he was a-winnin' all his stakes, Mr. Jerry,' he says—'puttin' by money, I thought he was.'—'Shore-ly,' says Mr. Jerry, 'till he come acrost this here Moses Wardle. You know *him?*' And the Hom'libus knowed him. 'Him they call the 'Anley Linnet?' says the Hom'libus.—'That's your man,' says Mr. Jerry. 'And he says Peter may butt to his 'art's content—he don't care! And the arrangement was for fifty pound a side, and relaxation Rules in respect of buttin'. "He may do his worst by me," says the Linnet. Now,' says Mr. Jerry, '*you'll* understand *me* easy enough. If I ketches this boy on one side of his 'ead, his 'ead 'll give, and may be no great 'arm done! If I ketches him both sides at once, like this ('Don't you be frightened,' says he, '*I* ain't a-goin' to hurt you'), what becomes of this here boy? Sends for the undertaker, he does!' and he give me a penny for standing still. 'Well,' says the Hom'libus, 'and when the men shook hands, what happened?' 'Why, in coorse,' says Mr. Jerry, 'Gunn goes straight for his man's stummick as usual, and just as he reaches him round comes the Linnet's knuckles behind his ears simultaneous. He'd been trainin' for it, and it was just like a nutcracker made of two sludge hammers. Of course he goes down on his back and 'as a little peace and quiet till they calls Time, and then he does the same thing again. Gunn's backers was gettin' oneasy.'—'How often did Gunn come up?' says the Hom'libus. 'Maybe three time, or maybe four!' says Mr. Jerry. 'Then they carried him off the ground, and Moses he pockets his money, and goes home to his farmley.' And then the Driver he 'ollers, 'Bring me out that 'arf-a-pint, James,' and when he takes it he says to James, 'Ain't it, James?' and James he says 'Ain't it what?' 'Sickenin' to see you,' says the Driver, pleasantry-like. And he 'ands him back the pewter, and says good-morning to Mr. Jerry and drives off. 'Cos the Fares they was getting impatient."

CHAPTER X

ABOUT JOE NOW, AS HE WRITES. AND ABOUT SOME OLD, OLD LETTERS OF LOSSIE'S. SOME MORALIZING YOU MAY SKIP. HOW LOSSIE WENT TO THE SEASIDE. PORKY OWLS'S OBSCURANTISM—SOMEWHAT OF MISS VIOLET'S GRANDES PASSIONS.

I WHO write this am an old, or perhaps I should say oldish man whom you have possibly seen at the British Museum Reading Room. I have not the slightest idea whom I am addressing. Until you are in a position to vouch for your own existence, you must continue a mere hypothesis; perhaps not more so than most of the readers of many of the books I can obtain with my magic ticket. But you are possible, though not probable; and I shall avail myself of my irresponsible omnipotence to deem you actual, as it suits my convenience to do so.

Well, then—supposing that (in addition to entity without qualities) you are a frequenter of the Reading Room, you may have been told by an informant that I was an old cock, codger, card, or party, who had lived a good deal in South America, who was an ingenious Inventor and not unknown in that capacity in England twenty years since. He will probably have added that I was a secretive old bird, or a shy character, who kept myself to myself a good deal, and even that there was no getting much change out of me. If you have never been in the Reading Room, this sketch of what you might have heard there will classify me, and enable you to form a still further image of me as I sit here writing this in my chambers in the neighbourhood of Guilford Street.

When I took possession two years since, the landlady assured me that they were commodious and airy. I might have discussed the point, but she had added that she had buried two husbands there; and that appeared conclusive at the moment, though further experience has weakened my faith. The rooms are airy enough certainly when all the windows are open, and I can keep them open if I choose. But as for commodiousness, I never have more than one guest at a time; so no strain is put upon their resources. I have some furniture of my own in a pantechnicon, and on my return from Brazil could have furnished a place for myself. But I found it easier to come here, as I wanted to resort to the Museum, and did not want encumbrances. In fact, I did not like being bothered; and thought furnished apartments the easiest to run away from if any one came after me whom I wished to avoid. In case this way of putting it should cause uneasiness, let me add that I am not a criminal. Neither had poverty any influence in my choice of a residence. It was merely that I wanted quiet for myself, leisure for writing, and had no motive or desire for renewing intercourse with the few survivors of those whom I had known in my youth in England. There were still one or two living whom I definitely wished to shun, for reasons which will appear in my story. I fancy these believe me still in South America. But the absorbing power of twenty years is marvellous, and if I met them now I doubt if any of them would care to re-animate a fossil friendship. Bygones would not stand in the way, for they are fossils too! But it would be stale, flat, and unprofitable unless——

However, I won't fill out that sentence just yet. I'll see about it at the end of my narrative, or leave it to fill itself out.

For the present I wish you to keep my image in your mind as that of a man of sixty (say in round figures) engaged in historical research, chiefly connected with Engineering. I have no objection to telling you, if you like, the name of a work I have in hand. It is *The Relation of Mechanics to Music with especial reference to their place in History.* It will probably never be read, any more than this Memoir; but I write it for the same reason; namely that I have begun it, and having begun it wish to finish it. Why I began it I do not know, but I know why I began the Memoir. It was as an experiment to see how much I could really recollect if I once began to try, and then I got led on. It has become a sort of trial of strength with me now, and the more I come to memories I shirk, the more I nerve myself to the efforts to record them.

The very first thing that set me on the track of my early boyhood was the reading of some old letters of Lucilla Thorpe's written half-a-century ago—yes! half-a-century ago—to a great friend of her girlhood, Sarita Spencer. This friend married and went to live in Ceylon, where she died, many years back. The course of events by which they came into my possession will develop in the story. I found them two years ago with many others in a box which I disinterred at the Pantechnicon when I returned from Brazil. I opened the first packet, and glanced at one of them, then replaced it from sheer cowardice. But it started recollections in my mind which led to my writing as much of my narrative as I could without difficulty recall, and I now go back to the letters (painful as it may be to read them) as a means of helping me forward to still further recollections.

It is strange to think that the old letter that I have again released from the soiled wrapper that contained it for so many years, was actually written in that very same Poplar Villa. But it was, and the almost invisible pencil writing on the wrapper is Lossie Thorpe, 1849-60. Of course now and again letters are kept (and kept clean, as these are now the wrapper is off) for half-a-century; and they must have been written *somewhere,*—so why not this one at Poplar Villa, on a warm June evening under the very pear tree whose fruit I helped to pick in September? Why does it seem to me so very strange that that paper was held and written on by that very Lossie, that that brown ink-blot is the very same black ink-blot she complains of in connection with Joey, and that the rest of that blot had to be washed off the hand that I so well remember the hair bracelet on?

My own particular sorrow's crown of sorrows has always (as I said) been the telling of bad news. So the remembrance of happier things has to go second. But it doesn't make it much better that there happens to be something still worse.

I almost wish I could, having set myself the task, just write my own story straight through from memory, helped by probability. When one has made the plunge into the sea of one's own past, one can swim about happily enough till one has to cut one's feet returning to shore! The sleeper in Newgate, who has to be called early to go and be hanged, would dream he was birds'-nesting or playing at marbles in perfect comfort if you would only let him alone. And these schoolgirl letters won't let me keep the dream real. They remind me with a continuous refrain, that what was *Now* then, is *Then* now, and I should like to be able to forget it. But I cannot manage so well without them, so I must have my tooth out over it. What draws my tooth is the actual paper, the same that that hand touched; the actual blot, whose unpreserved half was washed off fifty years ago; the very folds the inky fingers pressed. I can live through the past again in peace when once I am well started, but I flinch from these connecting links of tangible reality.

However, it has to be done, so here goes! You know what it feels like, when your dentist clips your tooth-root round with those beautiful shiny pincers?

LOSSIE THORPE TO MISS SARITA SPENCER.

"POPLAR VILLA, June 16, 1850.

"MY DEAREST SARRY: It's such a lovely afternoon I must write you a long letter. Vicey and Aunty will have to change the books at Mudie's, that is, if Aunty will only go and get ready and leave those drains alone. There won't be a drop of water left in the cistern.

"Do you know, I am convinced you are right about Miss Dunckelmann. She came to England to learn English, and never taught us a word of either German or French. This new one is said to know lots—but she seems a perfect martyr to Neuralgia. I do not know what earthly use it is *being able* to teach French and German and Latin and Mathematics if you can't do it. I'm very sorry for her, of course; but if I were to undertake to teach you Chinese and then only have Neuralgia what would you say? I don't mean, dear, that *you* would find fault. I'm sure you would put up with anything. But it *would* be exasperating, wouldn't it? For my part I can't see the least why girls *shouldn't* have caps and gowns and be real students. What was Papa to do with us girls, I should like to know? You know Mamma had a *horror* of Boarding Schools for girls, and so Papa didn't like to so soon after, or even Miss Namby's where you went would have been better than growing up a weed, and not knowing French and German. As for poor Aunt Izzy, you know what she is. I'm sure you never lived in this house the inside of a month without finding that out.

"You know, dear, I so often think if Mamma had lived it would have been different, because a Mother is quite another thing to an Aunt, however high her standard. Of course I feel that I am a most *ungrateful* girl to poor Aunty, who I know is goodness itself, and the sacrifices she makes—of course, too, I know I never was grateful to darling Mamma—but then I didn't have to be, and that just makes *all the difference*. I know it's because one is bad—but the minute one has to be grateful one isn't. Only when it was Mamma one never thought about it being grateful, one rushed off straight to her to cry when one wanted to cry, or to make her laugh too when it was anything nice. I recollect when I was ten, and Uncle Creswick brought us all birthday presents instead of only me, how we could hardly stop to thank Uncle, and all rushed off like maniacs up to Mamma's room, and Papa came out and said not quite such a noise, and we could hardly stop to show even him. And it was always Mamma first thing in the morning, and

Mamma last thing at night. And then you know how we all went to stay at Grandmamma's. And then one day Papa drove up when we were at breakfast. And Grandma got up and went out and pulled to the door, but I heard her say 'Well?' And he said this morning at three. And then I heard him say I can tell them, Mother, I shall not break down. And then I ran out. And you know, dear, what it was like because I told you. And then when Papa fetched us all back a week after, it wasn't Mamma but Aunt Izzy at the door. And we all walked about on tiptoe and whispered. And then Joey began, only he was dreadfully red and made frightful grimaces.

"I know I've told you all this before, dear, lots of times. But I can't help going on if I begin; and it's good for me because now if I get lying awake to-night, I shan't go over it half so much if I know it's in this letter in the Post. You know one does go over and over it so, and things always will happen to bring it back. There's that little Ducky who knows nothing of his Mother except that she is buried at Colchester and that's all the Geography he knows too. And to-day when Papa and Professor Absalom were talking about Ethics he cut in and interrupted the conversation to state that Ethics was in Colchester—by which he meant that Colchester was in Essex. Poor darling Pa couldn't laugh as Professor Absalom did—and I don't wonder.

"Do you know what that great splodge of ink is? That's Joey, of course. He wants to write too, and then he climbs up on me and gets at the ink over my shoulder. It doesn't matter on this letter, because it came on the clean paper, and I can write round it. But it's gone on my hair-bracelet that was Mamma's, and I don't know if it will come off. Joey has offered to suck it off, but I don't think ink is good for him.

"What do you think Vicey and her friend Alice Pratt have done? Of course I oughtn't to tell because I promised not. But I shall—because Vicey solemnly promised not to say a word about what I told her Jane Pennell said about what Sarah Sant said about her Uncle's property in Worcestershire. And then went straight away and told Alice Pratt. So I don't hold myself the least bound—and I don't see why I shouldn't tell you (it's secret, mind) that she and Alice Pratt have promised on honour that if any gentleman ever proposes to them they will tell each other exactly what he says. Isn't it silly? Besides, no gentleman ever *will* propose to Alice Pratt, with that nose. If you and me were to do so, there might be some sense in it, because *you* have a reasonable nose, dear.

"Now I mustn't write any more nonsense. I'm sure nobody to read this would ever imagine I was an almost nearly grown-up girl. So with ever so much love, as Joey says, I remain,

"Yours affectionately,

"LOSSIE THORPE."

Would anybody, I wonder? When I read this through first, I answered that nobody would. The second time I decided that probably most people would say it was a very fair all-round letter for a girl of that age, at that date, without graduates for governesses, or Newnham and Girton on the horizon. The disappointment I felt at first was because I expected a renewal or repetition of the impression I had received from the writer half-a-century back. You see, at that time I was only a little ragamuffin eight years old, very little better off in his surroundings than the two scapegoats of my bottle-throwing exploit. I wonder, if I could in the form of my *now* Self walk in at the swing-gate again at Poplar Villa (I should be able to look over it instead of through the third bar up) and find the *then* Dr. Thorpe and his family at home, should I come away unimpressed, and say those girls of the Doctor's seemed rather nice, but how dreadfully they spoil that child?

The suggestion grates on me and I prefer to think that the written record is wrong and Memory is right. Anyhow, the latter is now part of Me, and may as well go on to the end. Because the end will come, and then there may be no more *Me,* or at least no more visible and audible evidence of my existence to my fellow-men.

I cannot understand either the frame of mind that shrinks from extinction, nor that which professes to anticipate and believe in it. I should not be surprised if after all the Egyptians were right, and the death of a man were the birth of a soul. But (like my namesake, Joey) I wants to know: and supposing this to be the case, are we always to live on under a burden of old griefs constantly accumulating at compound interest, for ever? Or will a time come when the onrush of some inconceivable Dawn will brush aside the cobwebs of the unsatisfactory past—even the pleasures Memory has turned into pain—and put the shocking old house in order for an interminable day?

Really if there be no such prospect, would it not be better to be that entirely self-satisfied thing, a Non-Entity? Or failing the possibilities of non-existing, to go through a subterranean phase, at Kensal Green or Woking, and only be restored to consciousness (and the recovery of a good deal of dispersed nitrogen and carbon) within twenty-four hours of a settlement guaranteed complete and final?

I believe the last idea was nearly the excellent Mr. Capstick's—or, at least, it formed the Matrix of a complicated Mixture, in which the departed who had "fallen asleep in Jesus" were devoured by worms under the sod while reposing in Peace there and looking forward to a joyful Resurrection; all which did not interfere with their joining in the Choir of the Blessed and even infesting Abraham's Bosom. Poor Mr. Capstick! Perhaps the multitude of Solutions which he poured into this Mixture were like the dozen or so of remedies your doctor gives you in one tablespoonful, in a glass of water, every four hours, one or other of which you feel pretty sure must do you good. I really think the Mixture did my Mother good. As to my Father, he merely said (adopting, but spoiling the medical metaphor), "Capstickses pills goes in at one ear and out at the other."

Sarita Spencer must have been staying at Poplar Villa very shortly before I went there, as the letter which follows, written just before the family's departure for Herne Bay, treats the visit as a recent one. There are one or two intermediate letters, speaking of her coming visit in July. But of course this is the first that has the strong interest of an allusion to myself. After referring to some unimportant incidents of the visit, the letter continues thus:

—"We should have been very dull, dear, after you went only there was all the excitement of the hunt for your ring and the Police came about it, and had refreshments in the kitchen and suspected the servants, and after all there it was in the toothbrushes all the time! Then Aunt Izzy got her way about the drains and they've all got to be done while we're away. And the man that came about the Drains brought such a nice little Boy with him, who is eight but might have been seven, he is so small and compact. I must tell you about him because Pa is going to send him to school where Nolly is. Not but what I hate Mr. Penguin and think him a ridiculous old prig. I don't want to be apologized about even by Papa and called a young Puss to any Mr. Penguins.

"I took the Boy in the garden and made him pick pears. And he's been here to-day and made us all laugh so with his funny accent. Only Vicey went into a Rage about me and him. And then afterwards when we were all at dinner she wanted Papa to tell me not to go on like that. And Papa said, 'You're not to go on like that, Lossie dear. Give me a baked potato with your fingers, dear, but on no account go on like that, and then Vi will tell us what you are not to go on like.' And then Vicey said, 'Why, in that irreligious way with dreadful Boys out of the street—talking about Eternity and the Lord!' And Pa said it was very sad, and how came I to talk of such irreligious things as Eternity and the Lord to dreadful Boys out of the street? And Vicey said well I knew he said plunged-into-Eternity and the Minister-of-the-Lord—some horrid Dissenting parson he'd got—and for her part she didn't think it was a thing to joke about. And another time, she said, she wouldn't sit there. And then Aunty murmured submissively from her end of the table, 'I am not quite sure that perhaps Violet may not be right, dear Randall.' And Pa said Oh there was no doubt about it, and quite took Aunty in and she said she was glad he thought so. And then he said, 'Now mind, Lossie, never you say plunged-into-Eternity or the Minister-of-the-Lord to dreadful Boys out of the street or your sister won't sit there.' And then Vicey got up in tears and said she didn't want any more dinner and would go. And I had to run after her and fetch her back and tell her it was a Roly-poly Pudding.

"But that's not really what I wanted to tell you about, but how Pa had the Boy up into his room and I found him sitting on dear Pa's knee doing Euclid. And when Vicey came back Pa tried to make peace by telling us all about it. But Aunty and Vicey wouldn't show any interest and were chilly and meek. So Pa said never mind Lossie he'd show me. And I can do Euclid myself, so I could understand. Joey Vance (that's the Boy's Name) said he and a friend could make a triangle with all the sides the same and all the corners the same sharpness so that there should be no right side up, if they took their two peg-top strings the same length and made two circles a string apart. It was something Pa said in the way he put it that made him think the Boy should be properly educated. Penguin would do to begin with till he could see his way.

"Papa says too he thinks the Boy's Father must be a very clever Builder as he knew there was no drain under the front garden, and Pa thought there was. He said he must have been some time in business as he had seen his name up so often at his place along our road. And Vicey said if he had plenty to do why doesn't he dress and educate his son better? And Pa said he didn't say he *had* plenty to do. And Vicey said why hadn't he, then—he ought to! And Pa said probably a Man without Capital. The Boy's mother is to come and see Pa about it when he has seen us safe to

Herne Bay and come back by the Monday Boat. We are all busy now packing and Aunty and Vicey are making a great fuss and won't allow anything to go at the bottom of any box or it will be crushed. And as I finish this letter in a hurry I can hear a shindy going on between Aunty and the laundress about The Wash being back in time. And of course it won't, because it never is even if that unintelligible old Mrs. Packles promises ever so. And it will have to be sent down separate after and Vicey will have a bad cold first thing and borrow all my pocket-handkerchieves. Joey wants to send you four kisses which he wishes to draw himself, but really I can't let him even if he howls because I must hurry away to pack. Good-bye, dear,

"YOUR AFFECT. LOSSIE.

"P. S.—I have compromised with Joey. He is to be allowed to lick the envelope. Good-bye."

I did not expect to come across my old friend Mrs. Packles, inarticulate and apologetic, in the front pantry probably, testifying, over a basket load of cleanness tucked up round the top with a red bandana handkerchief, to the unexampled good faith she proposed to exhibit. Her sudden appearance had a strange effect on me—that of a moment of apprehension that she would communicate the tale of my Father and the Sweep to Poplar Villa and upset everything. The fifty years had slipped away as I read. In an instant they recollected me and came back brandishing a change of tense for Mrs. Packles; to be sure she *might have* told them all about it. But then apparently she didn't! I don't think the story ever reached the Villa.

I was not the least surprised to find recorded another instance of the effect of the Magic Board. No sooner did Dr. Thorpe's eyes light on it than ex-post-facto visions of that Board came unquestioned and convincing into what he really thought was his Memory. There never was another Board like that one! I discerned its influence also on Dr. Thorpe in the correct attitude of mind shown by his way of accounting for my Father's backwardness in the world. If it had not been for the Board he would have said perhaps my Father tippled, perhaps he didn't pay the weekly wages, perhaps he was quarrelsome, perhaps he hadn't any money—perhaps anything! But the Board mesmerized him, and directed him to say that he was a Man without Capital. It was probably an unconscious record that my Father was on the first stepping-stone to success. For no sooner is it clear that you are a Man without Capital than it is nearly equally clear that the Capital you haven't got is somewhere else, and may drift your way. Of course it is uninvested and lying idle, because nobody in his senses would disturb an Investment. But it is in the air, and if you make it distinctly understood that you are only going to handle it, but not to use it for any specific object, you may capture some of it. Don't say what you mean to do with it! I know a lady who sold all her shares in a gold-mine because she heard that the Company had spent £2000 on one stamping machine. "It may have been *my* £2000!" said she, indignantly.

The next letter, written from Herne Bay, gives a graphic account of the journey.

"We had to get up at six to be in time for the Packet. *And the fuss!* I had no idea it was possible for any one to be in such a stew as Aunty. Vicey is bad enough, but then she never packs anything wrong, because she never packs anything at all. She only gives out that she gives up, and calls us all to witness that if anything whatever is wrong it won't be her fault, and that if the Boat goes to the bottom she hopes we'll remember that she said so all along. I think this the meanest prophesying. If I was a prophet I'd be one, and not make holes to get out at. But Vi is nothing to Aunty because she is a Puddle in a Storm, and carries no weight. Really to hear Aunty about those cabs! As it was they did come *quite ten minutes* before they promised. But there was Aunty! Looking at her watch every two minutes and calling to Anne over the stairs that she knew the clock in the Hall was slow, and marching off with sudden determination to Pa in his Library and saying, 'Randall, I *know* those cabs will be late and we shall lose the Boat. And you know how awful the confusion is at London Bridge and most likely all the streets blocked.' And then when the cabs did come Aunty denounced one of the horses as Unfit for Work, and wanted Pa to insist on its being inspected at once by the Society for Cruelty to Animals. And Pa said we shouldn't get off. And then Aunty got into another stew about the boxes on the top being too heavy, and tipping the cab over and coming through the roof on our heads. But the men said if they was corded tight enough across the top they wouldn't come through—and then Aunty was satisfied.

"But I really was frightened we shouldn't get the Boat. For when we got to London Bridge Wharf there was a stoppage and all our luggage had to be carried by separate men, and of course any one of them might have got away in the crowd, and we should never have seen our Box again. But they all said they were very honest and trustworthy, and appealed to a Policeman who said he wasn't on duty. However, in the end the party got off safely in a boat called the Red Rover, Captain Large, the machinery of which gave great satisfaction. Only Joey wanted all the brass parts detached and given to him, and Aunty was very uncomfortable at such a lot of heavy iron, and asked a Mariner whether the boat didn't sometimes go down, and he said not on this line. But he gave the boats on the other line a very bad character and hinted that they very seldom arrived at their journey's end. And Aunty conversed with him for some time from her eminence (you know her way) and gave him a shilling. She insisted on Pa saying Grace at dinner in the Cabin, and said in a hollow voice, 'It may be the last time you will ever say Grace, Randall.' And I don't know, but I'm almost sure some rude young men at the next table heard this and one said, 'For what we are going to bring up Lord make us truly thankful.' And I believe Pa heard it too, because he laughed so. I hope Viccy didn't. I suppose not, because she said she thought them nice gentlemanly young men. You know how she changes her note when it's Religion.

"But we weren't very bad, any of us, and it's always great fun going along the Pier, which is two miles long, in a truck with a sail, only of course Aunty, who has never been, thought it wasn't safe and asked a very stout man in blue with an oilskin hat whether it would blow over the pier. And he thought she wanted to know how soon it started and said presently Marm. And Pa said it usually blew over about halfway. Wasn't it a shame to make game of poor Aunty? Only I do it just as much as anybody."

This letter, trivial enough in itself, has a kind of indirect interest to me, as it shows that for the time being the Boy had quite passed out of Miss Lossie's mind, though the Boy's mind continued full of Miss Lossie and Poplar Villa. I gave highly coloured versions of the family to Porky Owls and other friends, and was indeed offensive in my claim of acquired knowledge in respect of Euclid. I clearly remember treasuring an intention to disclose my erudition suddenly to Porky, to his disparagement and humiliation. I felt that his vulgar technical superiority at Peg-in-the-Ring was at an end, and chose the first occasion to pounce on him with "*You* don't know what Equilateral Triangles are, nor yet Equiangular." Porky, with great presence of mind, denied the existence of both. In detail, and as soon as he had been informed of the claims of these triangles, he repudiated equality in the sides of any figures whatever except squares. "They would," said he, "be oneven all over exceptin' they was drored square." I endeavoured to convince him by drawing one on the ground (as I had said he and I could do) with peg-top strings, and I regret to say failed altogether to produce in him a Geometrical frame of mind. He entrenched himself behind the greater accuracy of eyesight of a chap thirteen months older than me, alleging that it all depended which side you stood, the two top lines being always longer than the bottom one, and the top corner always 'arf as sharp again. I pointed out that I had got 'em all off of one string! But Porky was a difficult opponent in argument, for he fell back on the inherent varieties in the radii of the same circle. "You try ever so," said he, "you'll never get 'em alike all the way round." He then took up the position that he (being older) could supply me with a much better form of three equal lines, by droring of 'em straight across a paving-stone. "What do you want with 'em jined up?" said he.

Porky was by no means the last example of his school that I have found difficult to convince. The Mechanical World, with which I have had something to do since those days, bristles with grown-up Porkies. No young man trying to bring forward an invention is without many experiences of the condescension of superior knowledge which not only offers him a better means of doing what he proposes, but indicates how much better it would be to use those means to do something entirely different. After this collision with Porky I decided to conceal my new-found learning. I had pictured myself careering into Fame on the sides or angles of instructive triangles. But I made no further attempt on Gummy Harbuttle or any one else. I had received my first snub for offering a new idea to an unwilling intellect.

There follow several letters from Herne Bay written to Sarita Spencer. A great deal is incomprehensible to me, and there is no one living who can explain it, except, of course, the writer, whom I can scarcely consult for reasons which will appear later. Neither if I could do so would anything be gained, as the unintelligible parts evidently relate to matters of no importance.

I am really only hunting for references to myself. Still, some passages bring back the family so vividly as to be worth copying. For instance, Lossie writes a sentence all wrong, and has to write it over again because of Joey, whom I can fancy climbing over her *morē suò,* and hindering frightfully. "I can't," she says, "scratch out anything and alter, because if I do Joey wants to know why, and if he isn't satisfied tries to clean up the alteration." The letter continues:—

"I thought Vicey had got rubbishing novels enough to keep her quiet, but it seems not. What does she do but go and scrape acquaintance with some young men who are idling about every day on the beach or rowing in boats. And then Aunty makes a row and says Papa wouldn't approve, which is very likely true, without any introduction or anything. I actually saw her let one of those young men carry her books up the beach for her and help her over the breakwater. I wonder if she's going to write to Alice Pratt about that! I shouldn't the least wonder if she did. But he can't be over eighteen so it could hardly count."

That is Violet all over. Of course she did! I suppose the reason I had not already seen her in this character was that there was no young male visitor at Poplar Villa when I was there. Then follows a little about Aunt Isabella:—

"Do you know Aunty is getting dreadfully deaf, and the other day when that clergyman said something about deathbed repentance, she said she hadn't got tenpence, but could change half-a-crown. And when that Mrs. Matthison said I'm afraid you find your girls very unmanageable, 'But, my dear Clarissa, even Violet is only just sixteen, and it is so *very* soon to begin thinking about such things.' And we had such a job to make out that she thought Mrs. Matthison had said *unmarriageable*. And then she said she could quite well hear, and we needn't shout! I hope it isn't going to get worse."

Violet evidently didn't think it a bit too soon. But whether she was unmarriageable or not, she was certainly unmanageable; and Aunt Isabella must have been conscious that she had her hands full. However, Violet clearly knew the weak side of her deaf Aunt, and regulated her conduct accordingly. For this is what follows in the same letter, written later in the day:—

"I declare I really am quite *disgusted* with Vicey. You know she is just as pigheaded as a mad bull when she gets the bit in her teeth. In spite of all I say, just fancy her actually bringing that young man into the house and facing Aunty with him! I must say

I do admire her intrepidity! Of course it may be all true what he says, that he's a cousin of the Bellamy Seftons, and that his Aunt Jane married an Arklow, but what I want to know is how did Vicey know he was when she let him carry her books for her and help her over the breakwater? He didn't rush at her and say I am a cousin of the Bellamy Seftons, let me carry your three-volume novel, nor, my Aunt Jane married an Arklow, let me lift you over this breakwater! And yet when I went down into the parlour there was Aunty already talking family with him and asking if those were the Arklows of Packlington or the Arklows of Stowe? Don't you know her dim remote genteel air with her eyes half closed behind her spectacles, and looking as if she was Debrett's Aunt at least? She only seemed a little uneasy about what could possibly bring a Connection of an Arklow to such a place as Herne Bay. The young man, whose name is Robert Sefton, said he'd come for a lark with his two friends, but that it was so awfully jolly that he wished his mother and sister to come too from Scarborough. Aunty seemed to think Scarborough much more proper for Family families."

Lossie's next letter a few days later treats Vi with great severity. But I think it only just to call attention to the first and last sentences of what follows, and to indicate that the very sensible boy, or young man, must have come in rather soon to assist in moralizing. Both these young people seem to have taken a very superior tone—almost too good to be true! Here is the letter:—

"I took ever such a long walk this morning all by myself. Only Joey of course. And I got very melancholy thinking about Mamma and what a bad thing it is for a girl like Vicey to have no mother to look after her and keep her in decent order. It set me wondering whether I really was going to have an elder sister who was a flirt—I always thought that flirts and forgers and embezzlers and murderers were things they had in other people's families and in the newspapers, but not people like us. I can't imagine where Vicey can have inherited it from. Perhaps our great-great-grandmother when she was sixteen always had some young goose in tow. And will Vicey's great-great-granddaughter follow her example? Robert Sefton's cousin Edward Clayton, who really seems a very sensible boy, or young man, told me Robert was just like that—if it wasn't one girl it was another. And he said he should like to know what Sylvia Halliday would have said if she'd seen Robert fastening Miss Violet's glove for her and every one a thousand miles away. Of course I said it would have been very unreasonable in the girl whoever she was to say anything about it, because why on earth shouldn't Robert fasten up Vicey's glove if it got unbuttoned? And then I said if every one else was a thousand miles off how came you to see it? And he said he saw it through his telescope. And I said how mean. And he said he couldn't help it because he was looking to see where Aunt Izzy was, as he'd promised to take her a bit of India-rubber, and he came across Vicey and Robert quite by accident. I dare say you'll say it wasn't a thing to make a fuss about, but then you hadn't seen Vicey when she tried those gloves on looking at those pretty hands of hers and then when one wouldn't button saying she thought the little bit that showed through was quite as fetching as the whole hand.

"I should have blown up Edward Clayton more, only Joey, who had been very silent for a long time, suddenly said, 'A lady or a gentleman?' and I couldn't think at first what he meant. Then I remembered that I had told him when I wasn't there he must ask to have his nose wiped if he couldn't do it himself. So I said 'Oh, your nose! Why, a lady, of course! Gentlemen don't know how.' And then Edward Clayton had to be explained to and Joey and I only just got in in time for dinner. But I went on thinking over Vicey just where Edward Clayton had interrupted. . . ."

And then a page is torn off, and the juvenile flirtations and Herne Bay beach and Joey's nose all vanish in an instant, and I awake to the fact that I am chilly, that the fire wants attending to (even as Joey's nose did) and that Betsy Austin, when she did my room up this morning, didn't do any oil into my lamp. I pay the penalty of a hatred of gas—a hatred which rejects its services; and my lamp will grow dimmer and dimmer, and I shall turn it up and prolong short instalments of life, and spoil the wick. Suppose I show resolution and blow it out! I will, and do. I also break a coal that has been out of sympathy with the rest of the fuel, and force it to take a part in public life. It flares, and I can now see to carry the lamp into the passage, that it may poison some one else. Then I open the window, and admit some fresh air, and a great deal of fresh fog. It is better than Paraffin. As soon as the relative values of chill and stench give a good average unpleasantness, I shut the window.

There is one more Herne Bay letter, a long one. But it is on other paper, probably local, which has not taken the ink well and will be difficult to decipher. And it is late as I write—and my eyesight has its limits. The remains of the firelight will do to get to bed by, but not to decipher a letter.

I will sit here a little in the half-dark and try to look forward and backward—forward to the next letter I shall read, backward over the long perspective of the years between.

What do I care to know about in that next letter? I feel a sort of interest about what will come of the flirtation, only being sure that nothing substantial came of it (or I should have known), that interest is perfunctory. I rather want to know what Dr. Thorpe thought of the two young Seftons and their cousin when he came by the boat the week after. But what I really—*really*—want to find in that next letter is some further allusion of Lossie's to the small boy who gathered the pears and had the funny accent, and whom her father was going to send to school because of his aptitude for Euclid.

It is so strange to think that she is living now! If only she could come in at that door and I could see her face again by the flicker of this fire that is dying! But I look back through five decades, and at the far-off end see an ill-controlled lock of sunny hair that will not leave the long eyelashes of two grey-blue eyes untickled. And a very small boy in London wondering whether Miss Lossie at Herne Bay recollects him, even as the old man he has become still wonders how if on reading that next letter he will find a record of that recollection.

Lossie begins her next letter from Herne Bay by saying she had hoped Vicey and her admirer had fallen out. But

"It was only that they quarrelled because he was irreligious, or Vicey said he was. She says he admitted that he only went to Church because *she* did, and Vicey says if that isn't Atheism she should like to know what is. I could have told her what Robert said on the steamboat, which I suppose was Atheism too, only I thought it wouldn't be fair to Robert, who said it in confidence to the others. However, unfortunately it didn't last, and now they are reconciled again, and Vicey told me last night that Robert is really at heart a thoroughly religious young man only not in sympathy with empty forms. I asked her if Church was an empty form, and she said of course I could twist her words to mean anything I liked, but the meaning was perfectly clear to any unprejudiced person. So I went to sleep and dreamed that Vicey was talking about the Archbishop of Canterbury all night."

"Sept. 5.

"I left this letter unfinished yesterday and must try to get it done for this post. I'm really glad we are coming back so soon, because Vi and Robert Sefton have got to be quite a nuisance. Last night I saw there was going to be a revelation, and no sooner were Vicey and I in bed than Vicey begins: 'Lossie darling, now do be a ducky and don't go to sleep just yet, because I've something I want to tell you.' So I said I was just off, and she would have to look alive. And she said, 'Oh, well, now I do call that unfeeling—if you wanted to tell me about an Offer *you'd* had, I shouldn't be so *unkind.*' So I said had she had a love-letter from Theophrastus Absalom—because you know it was *him* just before we came away. And Vi repeated his name with withering scorn, a syllable at a time. 'No, it was *not* Theophrastus Absalom, nor even my little Joey Vance's big brother, if he had one. But there! I knew perfectly well who it was, only if I was going to be unsisterly she would go to sleep.' I said very well only not to pull all the clothes to her side. Then she melted and became pathetic, and said that she and Robert loved one another dearly, and neither of them had ever cared about anybody else before, and it was so hard to have nobody to sympathize with, and wouldn't I tell Aunty. I said I thought Aunty would be jealous at having her new sweetheart taken away, and V. said very well if I wouldn't be serious she *would* go to sleep. So I said what on earth was I to tell Aunty, and she said tell her they were engaged. And I said stuff! they couldn't be engaged without anybody's consent. She said betrothed then. And it was a solemn matter whatever a chit like me might think. She was going on that she was Robert's and Robert was hers, and it was Destiny, when I went off to sleep. And next morning I told her not to be a goose. And it *was* Theo Absalom till a month ago whatever V. may say to the contrary. As for my dear little Joey Vance, my other Joey I call him, that was only the nearest fling she could get at me, only as he's so small and such a baby that you could take him on your knee and kiss him, she couldn't well say *him*—so she said his big brother! I wonder what Mr. Penguin will make of Master Joey. He gives himself airs enough about his System of Education. Papa wrote that he had seen his Mother about him, and thought he saw why the child is clever. The father he says is evidently a man of ability quenched in beer, but trying hard to burn up, and the mother a good and affectionate woman with a curious paradoxical inconsistency (all these phrases are Pa's) that shows a certain stirring of the brain. He had noticed her before among the poor people at the Savings Bank."

I suppose few people ever experience a stranger sensation than mine as I read the foregoing record of Dr. Thorpe's first impression of my parents; of the effect they produced on the man whom I have always accounted a second father, and surely one of the truest friends that it ever was man's lot to possess. And his impression was so accurate. The "ability quenched in beer" grated on me a little. But I am forced to acknowledge its truth. Had it not been for the additional stimulus supplied to my Father's resolution towards temperance by the feeling that his Joey had really got a New Latin Book, and was being brought up a Scollard, may it not easily be that the powers of the Magic Board might have been overtaxed? Little things turn the scale, even against the nasty liquid that the British Working-man has made his God, and this consideration thrown in may just have made the difference in my Father's life. Anyhow, a thousand souls that might have burned up are daily quenched in beer.

I know all these letters of Lossie's would have produced on me, had I read them as a stranger, an entirely different impression of their author from the one the little semi-ragamuffin received from the (to him) glorious vision that burst suddenly on him at Poplar Villa. Probably the former would be the truer, and would be generally in harmony with the epithets we have heard bestowed on Miss Lossie. Did not that lady, Miss Shuckford Smith's half-sister, say she was a Piece of Goods? and her Father testify that she was a young Puss, and her sister that she was a Chit? Can these epithets be made to harmonize with a small boy's experience that a sort of Angel has stooped out of Heaven to him in a flood of warm light, and left him with a budget of most precious events to narrate to his Mother? Well—yes—I should say it was the most natural thing in the world. Only one point needs a marginal note; that is the change in the ages of the young, especially girls, in this past half-century. I have remarked myself, and have heard it remarked by other old-stagers, that a girl now is often no older at twenty than one of sixteen in his boyhood. I should say probably Lossie at this present time would have been, at sixteen, what she then was at fifteen. Making a slight allowance for this, the dazzle appears to me the most natural thing in the world. Especially as it comes back in full force from reading letters in which I now see exactly what Lossie seemed like then to other people.

Why wasn't I overwhelmed also by Miss Violet? She was just as pretty, indeed in most folks' eyes a good deal more so. She was more *bien mise,* and had about her more of the young woman and less of the growing girl than Lossie. There might have been another year between their ages, all to go to Violet's score. But I wasn't her slave in the least. I only just looked at her that day I picked the pears, and then glued my eyes on Lossie. In a certain sense I have never taken them off.

CHAPTER XI

A VERY SHORT CHAPTER ABOUT HOW JOEY WENT TO MR. PENGUIN'S SEMINARY, OR ACADEMY. NEVERTHELESS, IT TELLS HOW HE DID LATIN WITH LOSSIE'S ARM ROUND HIM.

SOME arrangements must have been made between the Doctor and my Mother about my furbishing up for Penguin's; as I was so very smart when I presented myself on opening day in company with Nolly, as an experienced guide. I suspect I looked very much like him two years before, as I believe I profited by his old wardrobe. It was a very nice fit, and I felt puffed up.

In case it should strike you that I have said, or do say, very little about Nolly, I hereby declare that this is not that I did not love him, for we soon became very *liés,* but because when a life is absolutely and entirely devoted to gloating over a new cricket bat, a set of lancewood stumps the full size, four bails (and two over in case of loss), and two seven-and-sixpenny red balls with beautiful stitching, that life loses interest for an unfeeling world which does not care to wire in and gloat too. The practice of Platonic bowling (explanation needless to parents and guardians), and the property of yielding Linseed Oil like a secretion, belong to this phase of boyhood.

I can only remember one remark of Nolly's as we walked to Penguin's. It was "Picklethwaite says Dark's are better than Clapshaw's—*I* think Clapshaw's better than Dark's. Mine are Clapshaw's"; which referred to the qualities of bats. Otherwise Nolly was silent, dreaming about wickets.

When we got to school Nolly put aside his inner visions for the moment, and vouchsafed information. I have since seen reason to believe it was all wrong. For instance, he represented to me that a boy in spectacles, who sniffed suddenly at intervals like a minute-gun, was the younger son of a noble family all of whom had this unpleasant habit, besides being for the most part in lunatic asylums; that another always got off scot-free whatever mischief he did, because his father was a prize-fighter of whom Penguin stood in bodily fear; that one of the ushers occasionally came out all over bright-blue spots which had to be removed with powerful chemicals. And so forth. So I felt I was beginning to see the world. Nolly believed all these statements, and wasn't hoaxing. He had been told them by others, Big Boys, and passed them on to me.

I remember most clearly on that morning at Penguin's the horror and indignation of the undermaster who took myself and other new boys in charge, at my comparative backwardness in reading and writing; for of course I was behind the other boys of eight and nine, after such a scrappy grounding as I had had. I soon made up for it after, but on this first day Mr. Cupples, the sub in question, made me the object of popular derision. However, it was necessary that I should start neck and neck with my maturer companions, and the new Latin and French books were served out accordingly, and I carried them back with pride to ask Dr. Thorpe to write my name in them.

Dr. Thorpe was in his library up a ladder, absorbed in a book he had taken out from the top shelf. Nolly deemed it due to his function as guide to usher me in with "Here's little Vance, Pater, wants you to write his name in his new School Books." And the Doctor said little Vance must wait a minute. Then Nolly said to me, as an instruction from superior experience, "You wait there till the Governor comes down," and ran off to gloat a little over his Cricket Bat. And presently the Doctor came down, and picked little Vance up and held him out to look at (for I *was* very small) and said, "Well, you're not a very big new schoolboy." And I replied (being still at arm's length), "Please, Sir, I was to thank you——" And he put me down and said, "Good Boy! And now let's look at the Books." And then he wrote my name in the Latin Book, and said, "This pen splutters," and changed it for another to do the French Book. And when he had put my name in both, he went up the ladder again, and I carried my books off, longing to show them to Miss Lossie every bit as much as Nolly longed for his superior Bat.

I heard Miss Lossie's voice and her sister's, and the noise called Visitors going on in the drawing-room, with the occasional genteel murmur of Aunt Izzy; whose deafness at the moment I came near the door had led her into some misapprehension, for I heard Lossie's raised voice saying, emphatically, "No, Aunty dear, *not* serpents—*servants*," and then Aunty saying, "Well, dear, you needn't shout so! Of course I understood that I hadn't heard the word right. Because serpents *couldn't* forget to post a letter." Then I felt with satisfaction that the Visitors were intensifying and going to climax, and while they did so I suppressed myself to pounce on Miss Lossie as she returned through the passage, evidently intent on recapitulating the Visitors with Miss Vi and her Aunt in the drawing-room.

"Well, now," cried she, "I declare here's Joey Vance himself! Looking quite smart and a real schoolboy with books. Come in and have cake."

The real Joey was busy with the cake, and I am sorry to say exclaimed as Miss Lossie led me in, "He'th not to have that peeth.—I'm going to have that peeth."

"He shall have that very piece and no other," said Miss Lossie, giving it to me, "and you're a horrible selfish little Monster, if ever there was one!"

"Then," said the Monster, "I'll have that big peeth." And Miss Lossie said, "Indeed you shan't—you know very well that that big piece is The Cake itself. Now be a dear good little boy and finish the piece you've got, and if you don't burst perhaps you shall have a little piece more. We shall see!"

"We thall thee," repeated Joseph. Then fixing me with his eye, like the Ancient Mariner, he added, "He'th got on Nolly's jacket, and Nolly's towthers, and Nolly's wethcoat——"

"Yes, Miss Lossie, please," said I. "And they fit exactly. And Mother said I couldn't be too grateful, and I'm not. Please thank you so much!" I saw I had said something wrong, as they all laughed, and I suppose I turned red. But Miss Lossie set it to rights, saying, "Never mind! You're a dear little chap, and as for my Joey, he's dear, but his manners are awful. Let's see the Books." I exhibited my new books. And Miss Vi, who hadn't condescended to take any notice of me, remarked, "I suppose you don't suppose the child understands Latin Exercise Books?"

"Of course he doesn't, Vi dear," said Lossie. "But he's going to. Aren't you, Joey?"

"If," said Miss Violet, "you're going to go on calling both those boys Joey, I shall soon be in a Lunatic Asylum."

"Very well, Vi darling! I'll take pity on the other Lunatics, and call one Joe and the other Joey. Don't be miffy, dear!"

And Miss Violet (being also kissed) was mollified and settled down to a work of fiction with the remark, "But it *is* trying, Lossie dear, and you know it." Perhaps the relations of these two sisters to one another might be described as continual sparring with very soft gloves. There certainly was no ill will, as between them. But I was not popular with Violet.

"Very well, then," said Lossie. "Now we start fair. You're Joe, and Joey's Joey." But Joey said, "I wanth to be Joe, and the Boy Joey," and Lossie replied, "Just as you please, only that way you shan't have another piece of Cake."—"Then anuvver peeth of Cake," said Joey, and conceded the point.

"Now, Joe dear," said Lossie. "You and me can do Latin Exercises in peace."

I wish all my Latin Exercises could have been done like that one, with an arm round me whose hand pinched and patted my cheek, and then went further round to adjust that rebellious lock of hair.

"I know all about this," said Lossie. "Because I did it all with Nolly a year and a half ago. Sum—es—est, sumus—estis—sunt. Nolly wasn't at all a dab at it, and I had to help him. We translated all the English sentences into Latin as far as—as far as something about the Decemvirs."

I was just going to say that I had come across that august body while inspecting the book outside, while the Visitors faded away, when it became clear that Aunt Izzy was making a remark.

"We really must remember to call on them," she said. "It's six months ago, and they are going to Torquay for the winter. Do remember, please, Violet——"

"But, Aunty dear, you *can't* call on them. They're Ancient Romans and dead and buried long ago."

"I can't hear what you say, Lossie," said Miss Izzy. "I never can. You speak so fast! But I know the Miss Hennekers *are* going to Torquay, and it would look so, if we never returned their visit!"

"We didn't *say* Miss Hennekers—we said Decemvirs." And Vi had to shout close to her Aunt, who replied, "Well, but *I* said Miss Hennekers." And Decemvirs had to be written on a piece of paper, and explained as being some Latin nonsense in an exercise book of Mr. Vance's little boy. I felt hurt at the Decemvirs cutting so poor a figure, having acquired as it were a vested interest in them. But I was consoled by the allusion to my Father as an Established Person. Indeed, it became clear to me in the course of this visit that he had acquired great kudos by his address in putting the drains in their proper places, and removing them from daily conversation. As Miss Violet said, at any rate now it wasn't drains, drains, drains all day long!

"Never mind them, Joe," said Lossie. "We shall never get half an exercise done at this rate. Here's Miss Shackleworth. Miss Shackleworth knows Latin, and will tell us what 'Cæsar Gallos vincit' is——"

Miss Shackleworth was the governess who had neuralgia, and she was equal to the occasion; but when Lossie read,—"'Pharetra caret sagittas—sagittis?'—what's pharetra?" she said, "No, Miss Lossie, I am not going to show off." I have often been reminded of this discretion of Miss Shackleworth when gentlemen have been cruelly asked by ladies to translate for them Latin inscriptions, say for instance modern Latin on pedestals of Statues, or tombstones. They have been so unwilling to show off.

"Well then, Joe, never mind! We'll do without pharetra. You'll be able to tell me to-morrow."

"Oh yes," said I. "Oy'll find out. Oy'll be sure to. And come to tell you to-morrow." For I really believed Miss Lossie wanted to know the meaning of pharetra.

"There's that child *oying* again," interposed Violet from her abstraction over the book. "I think you might try to make him say *I*, like a Christian."

"Now, Joe, you hear what you've got to say." Thus Lossie; and I, having misunderstood, repeated after Violet, "Miss Violet loikes a Christian." Then Aunt Izzy wanted to know what every one was laughing at. And what the difficulties of explanation were I leave you to imagine!

In the middle Lossie took me away to see a large picture of Rome, where the people spoke Latin. Joey accompanied us about the house, and I was such a happy little boy, and I think Miss Lossie liked it.

And now it is all so long ago that it is little over twenty times as long that folk still spoke Latin in old Rome!

In looking back over any past there is always some sad note in the harmony, some black thread in the weft, that one did not notice at the time. Now that I look back on Poplar Villa, with the help of Lossie's letters and my own old age, always the reviver of early memories, I see this black thread—then unsuspected, now plain. Lossie spoiled Joey. With another child the conscientious effort she made *not* to spoil him might have been enough. But I see now that discipline was wanted, and Joey never had it. What came about was perhaps not all to be laid at his door. Let us blame him as little as possible!

CHAPTER XII

MORE ABOUT PENGUIN'S. SOMEWHAT OF THE SACRED CULT OF GENTLEMAN. HOW JOE WAS PROMOTED TO A REAL PUBLIC SCHOOL, AND HIS IMPRESSIONS OF IT.

I REMEMBER, on the whole, very little of my schooldays, either at Mr. Penguin's or, later on, at St. Withold's at Helstaple, where Dr. Thorpe held a Life-Governorship and was able (backed by a successful pass-examination on my part) to get me a presentation. All schoolboys' experiences are very much alike, and unless I were to invent incidents I could tell very little about my own schools that you have not read before. Perhaps I remember most of Mr. Penguin's. This gentleman may have been what his scholars alleged, an Awful Old Ass, but he had one high merit, that of letting his boys get out of his sight as little as possible. This minimized the opportunities for Diabolism which the Schoolboy regards or regarded as his birthright, and which is or was a sacred tradition in our really respectable old schools. I did not become acquainted with this fact until I was initiated into the mysteries of St. Withold's.

Perhaps the recollection left in his mind of any boy's schooldays is in the inverse proportion of the amount of his attention to his lessons; and maybe that is why I remember so little of mine! For no sooner was I given books and tasks than I very nearly neglected healthful play and plunged straight into the acquisition of knowledge. I was a perfect *Helluo librorum*, even when the books were exercise books and called upon me to translate unconnected statements into Latin; as for instance,—The Cruel Slave-dealer anticipates the Scarcity—The Circumstance occurs-to the Brother-in-law—The Citizen encourages the Enthusiast—and so forth! I am not quite sure these are exact, but they are not far out. I know I translated large quantities of them at a great rate with the assistance of appropriate vocabularies at the foot of each exercise. But I certainly felt a new interest in Literature when I came to all Gaul being divided into three parts, and was actually "doing" Cæsar. As for Euclid, I simply read Euclid as Miss Violet read Novels. I was, in fact, to borrow my Father's expression when I started out with him to keep him away from the Roebuck, a Young Nipper that asked questions as if I was a blooming grandmother, and that usually succeeded in getting his questions answered.

At the end of the first term I was doing quite a lucrative trade in other boys' lessons. I always did Nolly Thorpe's for nothing, for love of Miss Lossie, and must have been one cause of Nolly's extreme backwardness. But when an unprepared boy came to me just ten minutes before class-time with, "I say, little Vance, don't be an Ass, but tell me what's The Climate of Africa Enervates the Centurion"; or, "I say, little Vance, don't be an Ass, but tell me what's left when you divide this by twenty-seven," I usually demanded a raised puff with red in the middle in return for the information asked for. I can't say I don't remember an application without the exordium above cited, but it was at any rate a very favourite form of speech.

I cannot describe the joy and pride with which, after my visit last described at Poplar Villa, I carried home my new class-books in their new strap and showed them to my Mother. I can remember the smell of the new binding, and the way the cut leaves stuck together, and the name in them which Dr. Thorpe (as their donor) had written for me on the shiny fly-leaves. A short time ago I turned over some old books I found in a bundle, and my eye was caught by my own name in Dr. Thorpe's writing on a fly-leaf of a coverless book. It was Croker's Latin Exercises for Beginners, and the thought that came (or thought of coming) first into my mind was that surely that was My New Latin Book—I still regarded it as *per se* new, and only accidentally old through lapse of years. But the ink-splutter caught my eyes, and I recollected how black and shiny it looked when it was new.

And it was that very book I carried home, and that made my Mother say, "Well—there now, Joey—to think of that! What your Father always *do* call you—a young Beginner! And only to think it's Latin you're going to begin! Why, you'll be beginning French next!"

"Oy'm beginning French too! Look here!" said I, and produced My New French Book. And my Father, who was wavering between satisfaction at my prospects and a desire to throw doubts on the advantages of Education, said, "Two jobs on hand the Nipper has! Both foring. Well! When I was a young man there warn't all this here larnin'. We had to do without it, and we did without it."—My Mother said my Father was no such great shakes to boast on when all was said and done. And my

Father said he'd have another pipe anyhow, eddication or no! His good humour may have been the result of his satisfaction about myself, or because Dr. Thorpe had just paid his account in full without complaint or deduction. Or it may have been because he had another job. For it soon became so very common for my Father to have another job, that the neighbourhood began to say Vance was very close with his money, it being assumed that he made large profits. But the truth was that Vance, swayed in some way by the Magic Board, was going almost without money in order to get himself suspected of having a great deal. He spent the proceeds of each job in making the next job believe he was handling Capital, and succeeded to admiration. Of course he never did anything himself, except measure. I don't believe he ever touched a trowel or a spade after that day at Poplar Villa. The young man William, or Villiam, caught on, and showed always a touching faith in the reality of his employer. He had a happy faculty of communicating this to others; speaking with conviction in Public-House Bars of Vance's Job over acrost yander, and suborning any number of confiding Navigators when wanted. A single excess of the Roebuck sort, leading to a rash wager on homing pigeons, or to one of his payments being put upon a horse, and never coming off, might have led (as my Mother once said to Mrs. Packles) to my Father's prospects being shipwrecked in the bud. But I do believe the little man with the truck was a gnome, and that the Board had Cabalistic properties. Anyhow, as we shall see in due course, the bud was properly navigated—but perhaps I had better not try to complete the mixed metaphor. I will go back to Penguin's.

It was at Penguin's that I first became aware of the Classes and the Masses. For Nolly Thorpe, who was charged to introduce me among his schoolmates, felt it incumbent on him (in a school where the boarders wore real hats to go to church) to indicate my extraction truthfully. Perhaps he might have softened it. He might have said my Father was a tradesman whom his Governor employed. Or he might have suggested that my parents were Reduced, and had been unable to have me taught to aspirate my H's. But to say, even in confidence, to other boys that I was only a Little Blackguard out of the Street was, I think, harsh. I did not feel it so at the time, for when I was told that it was undoubtedly true because Thorpe had told Pott's big brother so, I merely remarked that I could lick Pott's big brother and went on writing out my informant's Cæsar for him.

If you feel inclined to blame Nolly and to say he must have been an odious boy, you will be wrong. He was not odious at all. He only reflected the Gentleman-Cult of his school. I for one have always thought leniently of this cult. For as long as an artificial stimulus is necessary to keep boys (and men) out of the gutter, will it not serve as well as another? And it does serve its turn. Which of us has not seen, at one time or another in his life, some depraved beast, some filthy abortion of imbecility and inhumanity, stung to common decency, if only for a moment, by being reminded that he is a Gentleman?

Clearly the boys (it may be said) at Penguin's were not real Gentlemen's sons; because no real ones would talk of any boy as a Little Blackguard out of the Street. But they did, and I never heard any doubt thrown on the paternity of the pupils. And I got to be spoken of as The Little Blackguard rather affectionately than otherwise, and after a few terms my rather anomalous position was such that it was not uncommon to hear "Well—let's ask the Little Blackguard" as the final conclusion of some dispute on a point of Scholarship. Of course there was an intermediate régime before this happy state of things was arrived at, in which several deadly combats occurred. But it was not a long one, and my position of intellectual superiority once established remained unquestioned until I left Penguin's for Helstaple.

St. Withold's at Helstaple is well known, not only as a school that turns out all its scholars Men and Gentlemen, and qualifies them to bear their part in the battle of Life, with a due regard to the traditions of the class they belong to, but as a most interesting example of Late Decorated and Early Perpendicular. For it has a Late Decorated Cloister and an Early Perpendicular Dining Hall, of the former of which as much remains as has survived its judicious restoration thirty years since. Of the latter it may be said that nothing remains, in the most aggressive sense of the words, for there is not a new stone but is clamorous in its assertion that it has replaced an old one, and that it is quite satisfied with itself and confident that it will not be destroyed by fire like its predecessor. There is nothing that grates on one's memory of an old building, familiar in early years, like the intrusive cleanness and impertinent accuracies of its substitute. For in spite of its drawbacks, I loved the old place! I loved the historical association of the old Benedictine Priory, and was soon able to people it in imagination with fanciful individualities bearing the names to be found in its Chronicles. One I particularly remember as an idea having nearly the force of a sensation. He was Prior Anselm, and he used to spend a good deal of time on the river-walk among the willows and alders, watching the trout leap and the water-spiders wait for refreshments with one pair of eyes below looking for a bite, and another pair above on the lookout for a possible biter. Prior Anselm was rather like them as he looked down at the trout that were one day to come to table, and at the same time kept fixed on Heaven an eye to contingencies. If I were suddenly asked if I ever really saw the Ghost of Anselm I am by no means sure that my denial would be unhesitating. I should waver half a second. For as ships seen on opposite offings, when we are between them, become two ships on one offing when our steamer leaves them becalmed half-an-hour's journey behind, so does the long gap between now and St. Withold's make Prior Anselm nearly as real to me as the Rev. Dr. Boyce Lasher, who was the Principal in my time.

The effect that all men's schooldays seem to have on them is such that I am no way surprised at *my*self when I catch it saying to *it*self something about the dear old place, and how jolly it was in the water-meadows, and what fun we had in the dormitories over secret nocturnal feasts, and paper chases through the woods, and cricket and football and so on and so on—Oh dear, yes! of course it was a dear old place, and even Old Lasher, you know, all we boys loved him, etc., etc., etc.

Because, you see, that time is gone and can never come again. And none who were not there can gainsay us. We will have it so! It *was* a dear old place, and there's an end on't!

All the same it might have been a dearer old place still if none of the boys had been Devils Incarnate. Whether it was really necessary as a foundation for subsequent Gentility that a boy should inflict nameless tortures in cold blood on one younger and weaker than himself I do not know, because it is a point that depends upon its adjudicator's standard of gentility. I was, without question, by extraction (and very imperfect extraction) a Little Blackguard out of the Street, and I knew no devilries worse than those of the Beer-Maggot class from which I sprang. There were plenty, for a race that lives in beer and on beer, and to all intents and purposes *is* beer as the cheese-maggot is cheese, cannot be expected to have a high ideal. But they were rather to be described as rough brutality than diabolism. My Father's row with Mr. Gunn was a brutal one enough; but young as I was, and nigh terrified to death, there was nothing in it to my thinking half so horrible as the acts of tyranny and cruelty to young boys that made up part of the daily life at St. Withold's. Indeed, if I had to choose whether I would again go through the horrors of that afternoon, or witness the obvious satisfaction of the rev. Principal when he had a good crop of victims for the birch, I should take the former. Yet the worthy Doctor's enjoyment of a luxury which he and his forbears had indulged in for nearly three centuries was angelic by comparison with what went on among the boys themselves. I doubt, however, whether, if an examination could be made of the subsequent lives of the boys of my time, it would be found that the ones who acquitted themselves best either as Men or " Gentlemen " were also the ones who were the most vigorous exponents of the traditions of St. Withold. There ought to be an approximate proportion between the extent of adoption of a system good in itself, and its beneficial effect upon the person who has adopted it. I admit that to do justice to it we ought to be able to accumulate a large number of instances. It would not be fair to take the case of the worst tormentor in my recollection, and put it down to St. Withold that he is now a convict; or that another boy who fought him in the cause of a lesser victim in defiance of school tradition—and was beaten badly, for justice is not always retributive—owed his formation of character in any degree to the Saint. My own impression of this last boy is that had he never breathed the bracing atmosphere of Helstaple, but been brought up as a milksop at home, he would have died exactly as he did in the Crimea five years later, refusing a nip of brandy as he lay dying. " I'm done for," said he, "don't waste it on me—give it to that chap!" It was the ruling passion strong in death, and a wounded Russian got the benefit of it.

This is only a note by the way, to supply a reason why I do not dwell on my school experiences. I have no doubt they manage these things better now. Probably the fire which originated at night in a Dormitory close to the school-buildings opened the eyes of the governing body. For though it did not get into the newspapers it was whispered about that the first cause of the outbreak was a bottle of turpentine which was being used, or proposed to be used, in the pickling of an unpopular boy by his fellows. You scratch yourself and rub in turpentine and feel what it feels like!

CHAPTER XIII

HOW JOE RETURNED FROM ST. WITHOLD, BUT WAS AFFLICTED BY HIS HAT. BUT WAS RELIEVED. MORE OF HIS FATHER'S LEAPS UP IN LIFE. JOE'S RETICENCE.

THE end of the first term at Helstaple was an embarrassing time for me. For glad as I was to get away from the process of being shaped as a Man and a Gentleman, I was miserably conscious that the change I was supposed to be undergoing was supposed also to be a growing disfranchisement of my Father and Mother; a sort of constantly increasing discount of their claims to guardianship. Of course Dr. Thorpe never dreamed of the existence of such a feeling on my part, or it would have grieved him bitterly. In fact, I am inclined to think that in his estimation of the Respectability question, Dr. Thorpe was Early English or even Norman, and had nothing of Queen Anne about him.

My clothes reproached me all the way up in the stage-coach, and on the railway, saying in chorus, "You are going to show yourself in us, not only to your Father and Mother, but you will be detected sneaking in to change us by Mrs. Packles and Porky Owls, and they will denounce you to their circle as a stuck-upper, and will give reasons from their own experience why a presumptuous departure from that circle will never lead to good. They will ascribe to you the haughty spirit that goes before a fall." And the miserable little shiny genteel hat that was damning me in my own eyes as an impostor added on its own account the undeserved and unnecessary sting, "You know your Father never had a hat like *me!*"

You may fancy, then, what a relief it was to find on my return to Stallwood's Cottages that my Father had actually invested in a Hat!

This Hat exercised, in conjunction with the Magic Board, so powerful an influence on my Father's after life, that it is not to be dismissed with a mere announcement. It was the first thing I saw when I emerged from the embrace in which my Mother and I extinguished sight and speech, each on each, as I rushed into the little front room that Saturday in April; or rather that Easter Sunday morning, for I did not get home till after twelve at night. Well for me, for the populace had gone to bed at the closing of the Roebuck, and I had escaped the derision of mankind!

"Yes, my darling dearest Boy," said my Mother, "your Father likewise. And he went to eighteen shillings by reason of Moral Influence, and well worth it at the money he said. And it's that effective even Packles's niece's husband from Clapham says Sir, being found another job than Henderson's, and equally satisfactory. But yours isn't hurt though the corner just rubbed—so pick it up off the floor, and hang it on the other peg for Father to see when he comes. Like that! And here he is."

A great shout of joy and a similar greeting for my Father made him remark that the Nipper was the Nipper still for all his eddication. I felt that my character was being undermined by St. Withold perhaps, and that I might have to make a resolute stand against him.

"Two 'ats on two pegs," continued my Father. "It's a mercy we ain't Dooks with corrow-knights, a-swellin' of it about! What ever would become of your poor Mother, hay, Joey? Now I lay you've got a good twist for supper arter all that stage-coach and railwayin', and while you're a-eatin' of it you can just tell me and Mother all you've been a-larnin' at this here school."

I had the twist for supper, but was reserved about the school; being, in fact, resolved to keep the miseries I had witnessed and endured to myself as much as possible. Even in the first term the glorious traditions of the place had affected me, and I was already under the influence of Immemorial Usage. Besides, I had the resource of only referring to the events of the past week just before breaking up, when, in accordance with an ancient precedent, the functions of the birch-rod were suspended; and the big boys, softened to an artificial spirit of mercy, allowed the little boys an unwonted freedom from tyranny, and even had the brazen impudence to pose as their benefactors! So by referring only to this past week, which was easy, I soothed any suspicions on my parents' part, if such existed, about the sort of treatment I and others experienced at the hands of St. Withold. Moreover, in spite of their enquiries about my school-life, as I sat down to a large chump-chop and potatoes (which I welcomed in spite of the late hour), their interest had flagged before I got to the pudding. In this they were not unlike the rest of their species, which when I begin telling it anything usually yawns in my face before the end of the first chapter. Have you not yourself been interrupted again and again in your narrative of your symptoms by your friend's anxiety to give details of his own; or indeed (if he was Mrs. Packles) to lay claim to afflictions precisely identical but of greater severity? I have been assured by artists that one serious nuisance of their lives is the perfect stranger's soul-absorbing interest in their work; who, having on this pretext wedged himself into their Studio, sits with his back to their pictures and talks about his own.

So that, by the time I had recorded how I was at the head of all my classes, which was the case; and how the ice had given way on the lake and let six boys through, who were none of them drowned, but two were not expected to recover; and how Perkins tertius was put out of the window to go and buy things in the town after hours, and was caught coming back, but let off because of the holidays; and how the said Perkins's brother, Perkins secundus, was my particular friend, only his father was an Undertaker and nobody knew it except me,—I was beginning to feel that my listeners were on the lookout to take their turn.

The most of my communication was, however, making my Father understand the expressions tertius and secundus, he being determined to make a parade of his want of scholarship. As he pointed out, had he received a University Education at Oxford College, he would have been able to match his knowledge of these terms against any man in England. There was some affectation in this as he certainly could have guessed their meaning from the context. His knowledge of human nature, however, supplied him with a clue to little Perkins's impunity.—"O' coorse his Mother would have found it out within a week, if he'd been properly whopped, in the manner of speaking."—I thought my Father very sharp, it never having occurred to me that concealment from the parents of the pupils of St. Withold was an essential part of the Saint's system. He went on to indicate what he himself would do if entrusted with the care of four hundred pupils of all ages.—"I should wallop 'em all black and blue on the first day of the month, and that'd make 'em think."

"You know you'd just do nothing of the sort, Vance dear," said my Mother, "it being well known that your failin' is intoxicatin' stimulants, except lately God be praised, but never 'arshness to youth, and Joey there to witness to it."

"Very well, then," said my Father. "In coorse you know best. I should stuff and pamper their stummicks to bustin', and let 'em lie abed all day. But you ain't a-tellin' this poor little

Joseph about the 'ome of his birth—you'd better, or he'll be asleep."

This waked me up, for indeed my long journey and the chump-chop and the reaction were making me a drowsy though happy boy; and I begged to know at once and not wait till to-morrow.

"Well, my dear, then," said my Mother, "we're going away out of this house to a new one—this very house I married your Father into and the rent paid punctual ever since! Fifteen years next Michaelmas. And all five of you born here, and four buried and gone to glory, Mr. Capstick hopes. Your elder sister Elizabeth Ann after her great-aunt and died in teething. And your younger sister Jane in the fever, and your little brothers Christopher and Frederick also in teething. And yourself, my dear, Mrs. Packles and all the neighbours were wrong about, sayin' I never could possibly rear you, and there you are at the top of all your classes, and them to say so! And us to go away and leave the old cottage and go and live in a Residence and a little Orfice round the corner with a brass plate——"

My Father postponed filling a pipe, but left his fingers in his tobacco pouch while he protested against this brass plate.

"Not if I knows it, Mrs. V.," said he. "That little board I bought off of that caracter with a 'and-cart, by name Isbister, three years and a half gone, that's enough for a 'umble Builder like me. If I was Coobittses, that might be another soote of clothes. Bein' what I am, as I says (follerin' of Capstick), Contentment is my Lot, and let us pray accordin'!"

"You go along," said my Mother. "You to talk like that! And that 'at 'angin' on that peg to testify contrairy. Here's Joey a'most asleep——"

Joey was, and was soon dreaming of a respectable Divine with small eyes and large teeth, and a birch-rod.

I beg you will note particularly the indication of my Father's growth of conviction of his professional status. His admission that he was "not Cubitt's" contained an implication that he was not Cubitt's in some sense in which Packleses laundry for instance was *not* "not Cubitt's." It suggested that Europe might be divided into two camps, one maintaining that he was, the other that he was not. What a colossal stride in three years and a half! Also observe that the little Orfice round the corner was accepted as a sort of Builder's birthright. I felt an intuitive certainty that such an Office and such a Hat carried with them Books as an inevitable corollary, and an Office Clerk; and had I known a little more than I did then of Business, I should have been able to predict that nothing when looked for would ever occur in the first Book consulted, but that a succession of references would be necessary while you waited; and that it would, in short, be Double-Entry. Certainly that little Man (whose name, it seems, my Father's observant eye had seen somewhere on his hand-cart) was a travelling Magician, and my Father did most wisely to adhere to the Magic Board.

CHAPTER XIV

AN UN-ACADEMICAL SUNDAY MORNING. CONCERNING HIS FATHER'S NEW HOUSE. JOE'S WALK TO POPLAR VILLA: BUT NO MISS LOSSIE! HE TELLS HIS SCHOOL EXPERIENCES. ANTHROPOPHAGI. HE WILL FOLLOW LOSSIE, EVEN TO HAMPSTEAD.

No human creature can be happier than the boy who wakes at home, on the morning after his return from school for the holidays. Instead of being dragged away from unfinished sleep by an unfeeling bell, a dim sense that a benevolent Angel has said that you had better have your sleep out; instead of immediate conciliation of a tyrant who bullies you himself as a fee for his protection against others, a right to wash and dress yourself in peace; instead of a possible dose of filthy medicine before breakfast whether you are ill or no, breakfast itself; instead of tutelary geniuses whom you know you will have to stave off or evade for the rest of the day, parents conscious that compensation is your due, and not yet reawakened to the necessity of keeping even the best of Boys in check. No arrears of incompleted tasks or impositions, no Prayers, for even had there been any in our house I should have been too late for them—in short, nothing but unqualified home!

I remember particularly what a sweet and soothing sound the Sabbath bells had for me on that delightful April morning, when I woke very late indeed, and realized from their difference from the Helstaple peal that I hadn't got to go to church! So you see my Mother let me have my sleep out.

"Likewise your Father may just as well have his," said my Mother. And she went on to give me details of the premises and the little Orfice round the corner.—"Ackchly a back and front drawing-room, breakfast-room level with the kitchen, three large and two small bedrooms, commodious kitchen and scullery, at the moderate rental of forty-five pounds per annum. Only whatever I *am* to do *with* a servant, or *without* a servant! Your Father says I must learn to be waited on like my betters, but it's hard to reconcile myself to it at my time of life, after all these years of cooking and cleaning up. Not but what," added my Mother with a touch of worldly pride, "there *have* been servants in my family, for your Great-Aunt Elizabeth Ann's half-sister Mrs. Barrell had an establishment, with three, and a man to do the boots and odd jobs. I remember your Great-Aunt telling my Mother that he growled dreadfully in the kitchen, and shook the house. So I suppose I shall have to, too!—As your Father says, it's only habit, and we must all get accustomed. But it don't seem natural to leave off cleaning, and very likely a girl with followers, and a cook the worse. However, my dear, I mean to try —as becoming to your Father's position."

What a happy faculty my Mother had of presenting her ideas in lucid fragments! Even I, at eleven, could realize exactly her apprehension of her probable difficulties in a rise in life. Would it not almost be better to hold on to Stallwood's Cottages at any cost? My Mother anticipated an enquiry that was coming as soon as I should dispose of a bite of toast and butter:—

"Why, no, Joey darling, bein' there's no room for expansion at Stallwood's Cottages, and would involve business premises elsewhere, though of course in the manner of speaking a heart-break to leave the old place—where, indeed, I have been truly happy without dissension and indeed seldom too much taken, owing as I think to your Father being held out of his employment by circumstances for which I blame none and name no names. Besides, there is in the rear a plot of land with separate entrance from the side-road, in all respects suitable for the erection of workshops. To let on Building Lease for ninety-nine years from Lady-Day, of which your Father has secured the refusal."

Quotations from "To Let" bills seemed to work naturally and easily into my Mother's syntax. I recognized their source; and as to the justice of the implication that my Father had been all his life a Master-Builder excluded by conspiracy from business, need I say that I loyally accepted it? I am not prepared to say I don't believe it a little now.

"But I say, Mother," said I, "shall I sleep upstairs in a bedroom all to myself?"

"To be done out by the girl," replied my Mother. "Only your bed I make myself whatever Vance may say!"

"Wot's Wance been a-sayin' of?" said my Father, presenting himself in his braces and noiseless stockings from upstairs. "Who's a-pitchin' into Wance? Pour me out my tea, old gal." And my Father heaved a deep sigh, which, however, was merely provisional in case he should happen to think of a grievance. He really was in a most complacent frame of mind. However, he succeeded in throwing his next remark into grievance-form.

"And here's the Nipper only just this minute back, and I lay he's only waitin' to swallow down his breakfast to run away from his natural parents to his Popular Villa. And never commoonicating them none of his larnin' what he's been imbibin' of this three months."

"No, Daddy," cried I, indignantly. "I'm going to stop here all the morning and go after dinner. I *don't* want to run away from you and Mother." In proof of which I went and sat on his knee. "Besides, Miss Lossie will be at church!"

My Father closed one eye to express caution and secrecy, while with the other he affected to scan a remote horizon.

"I see," said he. "In coorse, Miss Loocy will be at Church—in coorse she will!" But on the subject of Miss Lossie waggery slipped off me like drops off a sea-bird's wing. I soared away into the heavens without noticing the water below. Dante might have been chaffed about the Signorina Portinari, but probably he wouldn't have understood. I knew my Father was chuckling, but didn't enquire why.

"Just a-tellin' Joey, I was," said my Mother, going back to the change of home, which evidently weighed on her mind, "that I should make his bed just the same in the new 'ouse. Also his things, there bein' no dependence on girls, even when such that followers are out of the question, and higher wages taken on that account. Knowin' as I have done a girl by name Sarah Carstairs whose appearance was security itself, and avoided strickly by gentlemen and young men alike, but twelve pounds a year and not a penny less, being indeed honest and sober, but as I say——"

"I want a 'ansum girl to open the front door," said my Father, "a regular Spanker!"

"Then Followers," said my Mother. "So sure as the sort you describe, Followers. And if Followers, then Consequences!"

"And then you bundles of 'em out, Consequences and all," said my Father. "And prob'ly you gives 'em a character for their next place when the Consequences has died in teething."

"But, Vance dear," said my Mother, who had quite taken to heart the case of this purely imaginary Spanker. "What's to become of the poor girl, I ask you, in the meantime? Because it might be ever so long." And my Father intimated that that was the Spanker's lookout, but so long as she was in his house, a clean cap and apron, and to open the front door stylish. But the cares of housekeeping with this attractive though non-existent young person on her hands depressed my poor Mother seriously.

I could indeed see that she was conjuring up all sorts of nightmares in the way of housekeeping difficulties, and I could not at ten years of age pooh-pooh them from my own experience. If anything, I should have confirmed her fears. For in my many visits to Poplar Villa during my Penguin period, I had been much impressed with the frequent collisions between Aunt Izzy and the servants, and the emphasis with which the former denounced the moral worthlessness and incompetence of the latter. To be sure, Lossie usually took their part! Also I felt that my Mother wasn't Aunt Izzy, very much indeed! So I hoped her fears were exaggerated.

I made up my mind that I would ask Miss Lossie what she thought on this point as I walked along the road to Poplar Villa. But here was a disappointment! Miss Lossie had gone to Mrs. Spencer's at Hampstead to stay over Monday, and had taken Master Joseph. The Doctor was in his Library—he always was. Anne suggested what I hesitated to ask, that she should tell the Doctor I had come. I said "Please, yes"—because the expression "You have come" revealed to me that I was expected. Whereas the expression "You are here" would not have done so. What nice phases there are in language!—I was told, after application above, to go up to the Library.

"Well, Joe! Back again? How do you like St. Withold's?" The question was put in a form that enabled me to say "Very much!" If it had been a more searching one, as, for instance, "How do you like being birched? How do you like seeing other boys birched because they have made a false quantity? How do you like emetics as a digestive remedy? How do you like being bullied?"—had it been any such question I should have bowed to the Great Law which proclaims Secrecy as the whole obligation of life to the schoolboy. I should have lied, but with great remorse of conscience. Probably the Doctor knew quite well that I should lie, and must lie, if he asked any questions the answers to which would reveal abuses. So he kindly held his tongue, and asked no more. I think he was right. Possibly he knew the failings of the School, but not their extent, and not being prepared for a crusade on the subject, thought it best that I should "take my chance with the others." Moreover, he had no choice of another school for his protégé.

"We're looking very well, anyhow," continued the Doctor, and I thought this form of speech suggested that he had to accept my answer without probing it. "What are the books? Let's have a look—Sallust? And you've done all that this term. Yes, please! —I should rather think it was, Yes, please. And the Anabasis? How many parasangs have you and Xenophon marched? All that? Well done, Master Joseph Vance! And Colenso's Algebra——"

And I felt I had my reward, for the Doctor patted me on the shoulder as I leaned against his knee and we looked at the books together, for I felt his approval in his hand.

"Don't you recollect, Doctor," said I, getting garrulous, "I wrote that I thought Mr. Driver would get me put up to the second form at once, and they did it after the first preliminary Exam. The first form were awful muffs, and some older than me! Dr. Lasher said it was no use keeping a boy who could do Herodotus by himself in the first form——"

"When did you do Herodotus?"

"Why, ever so long ago! Nolly couldn't make something out, and I did it for him. And then I thought Herodotus looked so jolly that I borrowed it and did some of Melpomene by myself."

"But how did Dr. Lasher know about this?"

"Because in English Literature there was about anthropophagi and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. And Mr. Driver said this showed what a lot Shakespeare knew, and that he must have read Herodotus. And I said to the boy next me that it wasn't in Herodotus. And Mr. Driver said what had I said to Salter. And I told him, and he sent me to the bottom of the class for talking. And then he asked all the boys what was the meaning of anthropophagus—and they didn't know. And I said Man-Eaters. And Mr. Driver said "You're guessing, little Vance! Write out anthropophagus two hundred times for guessing, and two hundred times for saying it isn't in Herodotus. And then I said it *wasn't* in Herodotus, because it was Androphagi in Herodotus. And old Driver looked and found I was right, and sent me up to the top of the class."

"And did you write out Anthropophagus five hundred times?"

"It was only two hundred," said I, anxious for strict justice. "No, I went to Mr. Driver after class-time, and said, 'Please, Sir, am I to write out Anthropophagus two hundred times?' And he said, 'No—once would do this time!' And he made me write it in Greek letters. Then he asked me what book of Herodotus it was in, and I said Melpomene. And he said 'Hm!' But directly after the Examination, I was moved up. Please, when's Miss Lossie coming back?"

This was sudden, but I felt that school trivialities had occupied us long enough, and serious matters should be attended to. Dr. Thorpe laughed.

"She *is* coming back—sometime—at least, I hope so! But as for *when*, that's quite another pair of shoes. When a young lady goes to see her dearest friend she stays as long as she can. However, if we send Anne to fetch away Joey, she'll come too. We'll put the calf in a cart and the cow will follow it. Suppose you walk over and see her. It's only seven miles from here to Frognall—are you game for seven miles?" I laughed seven miles to scorn. "But it's rather a cross-country," said the Doctor. "Perhaps you'd better walk to Charing-Cross, or 'bus, and get the Hampstead 'bus from Charing Cross."

"All right," said I, with manly decision. "But won't they mind?"

"Who mind what?" said Dr. Thorpe.

"The people where she is mind me?"

"Oh no! They won't mind *you*—or, look here! Here's a letter to forward to Lossie. I'll just write a line to say you're coming, and you can post it."

So the Doctor wrote the line and put it in a separate envelope. "If I had been mean," said he, "I could have slipped a little piece of paper inside the other envelope and sent my message for nothing! You see, Joe, what an expensive luxury a good character is. Now I must get on with my writing. Come again soon, in the evening."

And I posted the letter at the Tea-man and Grocer's along the road, and went home rejoicing.

CHAPTER XV

HOW JOE WALKED AND 'BUSSED TO LOSSIE IN HAMPSTEAD. HOW A LITTLE GIRL TALKED TO HIM, WHO PREFERRED DROWNING TO HANGING. HOW LOSSIE LIT JOE'S HEART UP; AND OF THE SPENCER MÉNAGE. LOSSIE MAKES JOE TROT ST. WITHOLD OUT AT THE FIRS ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH. HOW GLAD JOE WAS HE HAD TOLD NO MORE ABOUT HIS SCHOOL NIGHTMARE.

I WAS in a mighty hurry, you may be sure, to get breakfast and start. And my Mother was equal to the occasion, providing poached eggs and bacon, to say nothing of jam and marmalade. It was so unlike the days when my Father used to appropriate more than his fair share of his salary at Fothergill's, to treat a good deal too many friends at the Roebuck much too liberally. I believe these friends all regarded him as a backslider seduced from the Communion of Drinks by the Apostles of Mammon, rather than as a Freethinker, or advocate of Temperance on moral grounds. I thought of this as I devoured my breakfast rapidly (which was quite needless, as I certainly did not save five minutes by doing so), and hoped in my heart that he would never slide forward again.

"You just go straight along the road as ever you can go and turn into the Wandsworth Road and keep right on and you can't miss it." Thus my Mother, whose further instructions I of course despised; the wayfarer always does despise instructions when assured that "he can't miss it." But it isn't easy to miss London when you start within six miles of St. Paul's, so I only lost a little time, and found a green Hampstead 'bus as directed at Charing Cross. My experience in this case was the reverse of the metaphysician's who "defined" omnibuses as "things that go in the opposite direction."

In those days Hampstead was in the country; indeed, if it had not been for an outcrop of suburban villas at Haverstock Hill, Mother Redcap would have been very nearly the limit of town. Omnibuses thought this tavern the edge of civilisation, and stopped a long time for refreshments and badinage before venturing out into the wilderness. Mine was a very slow example, and must have whiled the best part of an hour between the Redcap and the cowpond on the left of the road facing Downshire Hill. At this point I began to despair of ever reaching The Limes, which was the name of Miss Spencer's father's House. So I gave way to impatience and walked up the hill. This piqued the omnibus, causing it to put an extra horse with a man on it in front, and to shout after me with triumph that I'd better 'a' sat still and waited a minute. Perhaps I had, but then the omnibus had appeared to be chewing the cud at the bottom of the hill, in sympathy with the cows in the pond.

Mr. Spencer (who was Dr. Thorpe's Legal Adviser) lived in one of three old red-brick-faced houses that had a front garden in common, and a way in for carriages, like Poplar Villa. The respectability of The Limes alone would have given confidence in Mr. Spencer as a Legal Authority. But he had, apart from this, as high a reputation for caution and responsibility as any solicitor on the Rolls. Although if Professor Absalom's view of him was correct, he had acquired his fame for the latter solely by an unwarrantable parade of the former quality. I once heard the Professor say to Dr. Thorpe, "My dear Thorpe, have you ever—in all your experience of Aldridge, Spencer, Spencer, and Aldridge—known that Firm to give you, or any one else, a decisive piece of advice?" And Dr. Thorpe replied, "My dear Absalom, if any member of that Firm had done such a thing to me, I should have lost all confidence in it at once. But the way in which Spencer prefers to reserve his judgment is worth volumes of other people's shallow decisions."

I found my way to The Limes and got there just in time to avoid a shower of rain. Miss Thorpe wasn't in; but would be, and had left word that I was to be accommodated with books to read until her return. So I was shown into a parlour that smelt of book-leather, horsehair, and conservatory, and had no one in it but a canary, who was singing very loud; and was given my choice of a volume, and preferred "Peter Simple," please—having indeed had enough of the classics lately. I was just reading O'Brien's description of *flapdoodle,* "the stuff they feed fools on," when I became aware that I was an object of interest to a little girl about my own age, who had sighted me from a back room and was working gradually up towards communication. As I saw her first in a mirror on the table, and had only been seen by her reflection, I thought I wasn't bound to take any steps myself, and went on considering what O'Brien meant. I had informed myself about flapdoodle by the time the little girl had got so near that I felt I couldn't pretend any longer, and I looked up at the original of the reflection, which was a rather pretty and very serious little maiden manifestly sucking a peppermint drop. She looked at me with gravity for a few seconds, then asked if I should like one. I was not sure that it was good form to smell of peppermint in strange houses, so I said I didn't care for it, which was untrue. The way was, however, paved for further advances.

"Are you Miss Lucilla Thorpe's Schoolboy that was expected and that's to stop for lunch?"

I said yes, with confidence. Miss Lossie had arranged it and that was sufficient. I thought the enquiry justified a question from me.

"Are you Miss Sarita's sister Jane that's seven years younger than she is, and called Grizzle for short?" Because though Miss Sarita herself was the only one of the family I had seen, I had picked up the family history.

"Yes—I'm Grizzle, or Janey—whichever people like to call me. Which will you?" I reflected a minute and decided on Janey. On which Janey added, "And begin now!" I nodded once with my lips closed, as a pledge that I would do so on the next occasion, and then Janey said, looking straight at me with a pair of hazel eyes: "What's your name? Because I can't call you Schoolboy!"

"My name's Joe Vance. The boys call me little Vance, but not Joe. You call me Joe, please!"

"Joe, but not Vance! Very well—you're very fond of Miss Lossie, aren't you, Joe?"

"Yes, very—aren't you?"

"Of course I am. But not so fond as Sarry is. She's very *very* fond of her. It goes by veries."

I felt that my education had been neglected but that now I knew.

"I hope you've got a nice book to read—there's plenty more here if you haven't. Oh yes! 'Peter Simple.' I'm so fond of Captain Marryat. They are capital books for boys." I resented this as patronizing. "But I like all books about the sea, because I like the sea—I would ever so much sooner be drowned than hanged."

"But, I say, Janey!" My promise about calling her by her name was a little on my conscience, and I felt easier as soon as I had achieved it. "I say, Janey!—you know you needn't be either drowned or hanged."

"Don't you think so, Joe? Perhaps not! But suppose you had to decide which? *I* should vote for drowning! I should never vote for being hanged, if they went on till Doomsday." And Janey sucked her peppermint drop with her chin between her hands and her elbows on a chair back, and looked very grave about it.

"I shouldn't vote for either," said I.

"Perhaps they won't ask us," said Janey, and I really felt the matter was getting serious. Could nothing be done to avert such a gloomy destiny? But we waived the point, for a knock came, and Janey said, "That's Lossie Thorpe coming. Now mind you recollect and call me Janey."

How odd the tricks of memory are! I had completely forgotten this conversation of forty-odd years ago until I bought some peppermint drops for some children this morning, and they ordered me to take one myself, and not spit it out. I never remembered it even when—however, that *must* stand over!

I checked an impulse to run out and meet Miss Lossie, as I had repressed a natural greed for peppermint lozenges, from a doubt whether one *could* take such a liberty as to walk out of another person's house and come back again, until at any rate one should have shaken hands with the whole family. But I hadn't long to wait for Lossie's "Is Joe Vance come? Where is he? In the Library?" and Grizzle's announcement as she opened the door of our room, "I've got him in here," as if I were a specimen.

"Where have you got him? In here? May we have some of him? Why, Joe, you've really grown in three months! Is it school or what? Remember I want you always to be a little chap, and don't grow too much—whatever shall I do if Joey begins to grow too? However, he can't do that for another four years at least—can you, Joey?" For Joey was still Lossie's invariable asteroid, although he had left his babyhood three years behind. But he retained a lisp, and with it, or in spite of it, he now remarked, "I want to grow up vethy thoon, and to have a horth." For Master Joseph whenever he spoke made a requisition.

"Well," said Lossie, "you've had a donkey to-day, and that's enough for *you!* Now, Joe, are you glad or sorry to be back, and how's your Father and Mother?" She kept my two hands in hers until I had replied that I was superlatively glad, with reserves about school being perfectly satisfactory to avoid awakening suspicion of the contrary, and that Father and Mother were both well and desired me to give their best respects. She then took her hands back to pull her bonnet off (for in those days girls wore bonnets), and gave it to Joey to carry upstairs very carefully and not squash it. I think Master Joseph was going to bargain, but his sister said, "Cut along, now—you've had a donkey!" and he conceded the point with reluctance. Then Lossie threw herself into a rocking-chair and took a good look at me.

I am glad I am not called upon to make oath about some recollections of long ago. If I had to swear an affidavit on the question of whether, just at the time Lossie came in at the door of that most respectable and tranquil Spencer mansion, some one did or did not open all the windows, and let the sweet spring air into all the closed rooms, and pull up all the half-down blinds and let in the sunshine, I shouldn't be able to make up my mind to swearing-point. It may have been so, or it may have been merely Lossie.

"Rather grave you look, at a distance, Joe," she said. "Come up near and see *then*—that's right, now you're laughing!"

I was laughing, though indeed I was a little frightened of Miss Lossie's enquiring eyes. I read in them a coming catechism about school, with a foreboding that I should not be able to tell favourable fibs under their penetrating gaze. I began betraying my uneasiness, like a little idiot, by importing foreign matter into the conversation.

"I say," said I, "what an awfully long way it is from Wandsworth to Charing Cross! And there were such a lot of people in the ferry boat it nearly turned over."

"Where on earth has the boy been? What ferry-boat, Joe?"

"Why, at Chelsea! Because I got off the road at Battersea, and got into the fields, and then got the ferry for a penny below Chelsea Church. And then I walked up to Sloane Street, and it had got so late I took the 'bus to Charing Cross." I enlarged a good deal on the dangers and difficulties of Chelsea Ferry, but my hearer wasn't deeply interested. Probably she saw my motive.

"You saw Papa, Joe, yesterday? Did you see Aunt Izzy?"

"No—she was writing circulars, and thought I was the Baker. So I didn't go in." Miss Lossie accepted my words as clear, so I suppose they were so.

"And of course," said she, "Nolly's at Claydon Court till Saturday. I want to know if Nolly thinks your school like Eton——" I got frightened again, but a diversion occurred. Miss Sarita Spencer came downstairs ready for lunch and said it was a quarter past one and lunch was half-past, and how did I do, Master Vance? I did very well, thank you, Miss Spencer, and might I wash my hands. This was negotiated, and while I washed my hands almost religiously (in view of the style of the house) I reflected on Miss Sarita Spencer, and why it was that I thought that if Euclid ever had a daughter she must have been rather like Miss Sarry. Perhaps it was chiefly, if not entirely, because her elbows appeared actually to be the angles A B C and A C B themselves, and because of a certain flavour or aura of plane surfaces of which one was conscious during interviews, or when following their owner (or subject) up the street.

I washed my hands so long that I had time also to wonder why she and Lossie should at first sight have flown into each other's arms, and down each other's throats; which was Lossie's version of what took place. But I only wondered because I did not at that early age know the law of the attraction of opposites. If I had, I should have said to myself, "Why, of course—Miss Lossie hasn't got an Angle in her composition, at least not one that would stick in! And if Miss Sarry were to try ever so to make her hair go in a fluff and get in her eyes, she couldn't do it. And Miss S. is evidently getting ready to be twenty, while Lossie hasn't quite forgotton how to be ten."—Sarry was a year older than Lossie, being at this date seventeen and a half. I have since then found out that there are two distinct classes of girls and boys—those who in youth are early versions of their maturity, and those who in old age are late editions of their childhood. When I last saw Lossie I saw again the Lossie of Poplar Villa. When I first saw Sarry Spencer I knew exactly what she would be twenty—thirty years later. But had she lived till now no one, seeing her for the first time, could ever have guessed what she was like as a girl of seventeen.

A sudden luncheon-bell stopped my reflections and sent me with half-dried hands to be shown to Mr. Spencer by Lossie, as my young friend Joe Vance who had just come from school at St. Withold's. On which Mr. Spencer succeeded, by saying, "St. Withold's—ah ha!" and then giving a little nod and shutting his lips tight, in making me believe he knew all about St. Withold, and had only a qualified opinion of the Saint, whereas I really believe he knew nothing whatever. This made me uneasy, and I was greatly relieved when, on being told that I had come by invitation to see Hampstead Heath, he repeated in exactly the same way, "Hampstead Heath—ah ha!" as if the motives of such a visit were open to suspicion. But Lossie dissipated his legal manner.

"Why *shouldn't* Joe Vance come to see Hampstead Heath, I should like to know? Come now, Mr. Spencer, don't be the Lord Chancellor, but tell us why—and give me some beef for Joe, because he's ravenous."

"Well, my dear Lucilla," said Mr. Spencer, very weightily, "as you press me so for an answer—stop a minute for some more gravy—I have no serious objection to making this admission—take care you don't spill it—to making this admission with all due reservation—pass me the mustard, my dear—with all due reservation, that on the whole I see no objection whatever to Joe Vance coming to see Hampstead Heath."

"Of course not!" cried Lossie. And Sarita and Grizzle echoed, "Of course not." Their mother, who was there, but who was one of those people who make no impression on others and who apparently receive none themselves, seemed to say something. She had iron-grey rolls of hair on each side of her forehead, and spoke under her breath, and I don't think I should have known she too said "Of course not" only that Lossie went on, "I'm so glad you agree with me, Mrs. Spencer. And we are all going out for a walk to show Joe Vance Hampstead Heath if it doesn't rain." On which Master Joseph, who was on the other side of Lossie, struck in, "I've been on the Heath wunth to-day. I want to go to the Zoological Gardenth in Regent's Park, and see the Carnivorous Animals fed at four o'clock precisely." But this was negatived and we got out on the Heath in due course, and Lossie and Sarita pointed across the London fog to show me where I had come from. The Wen (as Cobbett called it) was then a small Wen compared to what it is now. But the heap of fog that hid the Surrey Hills was denser for its thickness—for when I looked over London from the same point one April day two years since, I saw the Crystal Palace plain enough. And then I thought how Lossie and Miss Spencer and Joey and I stood there on that day, and how then there was no Crystal Palace. And Penge Park slept unsuspicious and unspoiled. But we walked towards the Spaniards without speculating about the growth of London. There were so many fields between, and the air was so sweet after April showers in the morning, that we didn't trouble our heads about anything.

At least, not for a moment. For when we had started for the Spaniards (after a demand from Joey that we should go to Highgate, and his being told that it was on the way there, and expressing suspicion of our veracity) trouble came into my head in the form of an apprehension that Lossie was going to have it out of me about St. Withold. Now apart from my wish to keep myself a sealed book on the subject, I was happy at the pause in the process of my conversion to a Gentleman, and was thoroughly enjoying the peace and the presence of Lossie. Of course, like the

Spirit that left the body, and had to return and reanimate it, I was luxuriating in my Heaven, and shutting my eyes to the horror of a re-entry into the prison-house. After all, that would be ten days hence! I wasn't going to fidget about that at least until Saturday. Eleven years old does this sort of thing very easily.

But then I had never had a secret from Lossie. In my three years of Penguin's I had naturally become a sort of tame cat at Poplar Villa. Indeed, at some undefined confluence of events, Miss Lossie had become *Lossie* to me; having, I think, for a short time stood between inverted commas as a protest against any presumption on my part. She used to speak of me as "t'other little Brother," and whenever I had anything to tell that was pleasant or otherwise, or anything on my conscience, I was sure to take Lossie into my confidence first, with of course a reserve in favour of my Mother after; the communications to Lossie always being made with a subcutaneous sense of what a pleasure it would be to tell my Mother what Miss Lossie had said of this or of that. For in speaking to my Mother I retained the *Miss,* not to put her to the embarrassment of a doubt whether she was or wasn't expected to change her own form of address. But I had never held my tongue about anything to either, and here was I resolute to keep a secret if possible from both. It was very unpleasant.

"Now, Joe, let them go on in front—and then we can talk. I want you to tell me all about St. Withold's."

The Examination had begun, and the answer to the first question was evasive. It was framed on the lines of Baedeker—treating of the antiquity of the school, the lateness of its Decorated period, and the earliness of its Perpendicular; of the number of its masters, and the profundity of their scholarship; of the smallness of Dr. Lasher's eyes, and the redness of the second Latin Master's nose; and then, becoming feeble and diffuse, drivelled down to the tightness of the first Mathematical Master's trousers. They were awfully tight and Purdy secundus reported that he had heard them bursting at the seams.

"Stuff and nonsense, Joe!" exclaimed Lossie, impatiently. "You know very well that Mr. Packer's trousers are not what I want to know about. Bother Mr. Packer's trousers!—Tell me about the classes, about the food, about the matron, about the boys—especially the bad boys. Are the boys, the bad ones I mean, as much flogged as some people say? Or is it all exaggeration?"

O that I had only to confess up to my own birchings (for that was the rock ahead) to one who would have cheerfully derided me and danced with joy over the amount of the infliction! O that

Porky Owls had been the Examiner! How I should have rejoiced in describing castigation beyond human endurance, cart-loads of new birch-rods, and Dr. Lasher fainting with exhaustion and brought afresh to the scratch by means of strong stimulants! But Porky had (so I heard) entered the Merchant Service, and was Heaven knows where! And it was Lossie, Lossie herself, that was waiting for an answer with the thoughtful grey eyes under the long eyelashes fixed on me, with somewhat, as I now saw, of more serious purpose in her questioning than mere concern in her little brother's welfare, however strong that might be.

"Come, Joe, don't sit there with your lips shut, looking like an owl! Do thaw a little and tell me things!"

"What about?"

"Joe, little brothers ought not to be little Humbugs! You know what about as well as I do. About how much bad boys are punished."

"Well! I suppose it's like any other School."

I was beginning to feel the uselessness of evasion before those grey-blue eyes, and indeed I don't know if I should have managed this one, only that when I looked shyly up to see what they were doing they were looking towards Harrow. My reprieve was short, for the eyes came back from Harrow with startling suddenness—

"Joe! Tell me the truth! Have they ever birched *you?*"

"Of course they have. All the boys get birched—it doesn't matter really whether they are good or bad—it's part of the discipline. Dr. Lasher says *he* was birched when he was young, and what would he have been without it?" For this was indeed the way in which the Reverend Doctor looked at the question, and impressed us boys with a sense of his perfections as he stood. For we accepted the view that a Head-Master who was satisfied with himself must be great indeed. Subsequent reflection has made me doubt whether a familiarity with Greek particles and accents alone compensates for any and every other defect of character—and I have since shuddered to think what Dr. Lasher without his early discipline would have been, if he was right about the good it did him. "And you know, Lossie," I went on, "they say at the school that girls and women know nothing about it, and that boys have got to be men, and that they mustn't be allowed to grow up Milksops."

"And so on, and so on, and so on, and so on," said Lossie. "I know all about it, dear Joe! Don't suppose I don't. What did they birch *you* for?"

"Oh, *I* hadn't been doing any harm. I was birched for contradicting the Mathematical Tutor. You know they put me back to do Euclid all over again."

"But why did you contradict him?"

"Because of the Definition of a Straight Line—a line that lies evenly between its extreme points. I asked him what lying evenly meant. And he wasn't able to answer, so he said I had contradicted him. And," said I, with a glimmer of hope that we might wander away from the birch-rod, "it *is* awful rot, you know—you might just as well say that it lay straight between them, or that a straight line is a line that is straight!"

But Lossie was not to be taken off the scent by this red herring. She insisted on full details, and I went on hoping against hope for another. "Well! Old Lasher didn't lick into me very much that time, to spite Packer, because it was Mathematics, and of course Lasher is Classical Languages and Literature and hates Mathematics. They always say at the School that Packer can never get a boy properly flogged. But Lasher laid it well on to a boy in his own form, for translating *populos* people."

"I thought it *was* people."

"Yes—that's pop with a short *o*—this was poapulos with a long *o*. Well! He gave this boy all my share as well as his own. It was Spendergrass primus—that was his name, you know."

"Yes—and then?"——

And then I wanted to say that the incident ended. But I had got involved in my own narrative, and the merciless eyes fixed me to more, though I had sworn to myself that nothing on earth should make me reveal the sequel of this story.

"Well—nothing! Only Spendergrass primus complained."

"Complained of what?"

"Complained that I had less than he, and it wasn't fair."

"Who did he complain to—to Dr. Lasher?"

"Dr. Lasher? Of *course* not! He complained to the Head Boys on my form."

"And what did *they* say."

"Oh, nothing—it doesn't matter."

"Now, no nonsense, Joe! Doesn't matter—the idea! I mean to know all about it, and you may as well tell me."

"Well—they said I must be pickled."

"Good Heavens! What did the horrible little wretches mean?"

With a mixed feeling of shame at the transaction, and of pride in its existence as a great and immemorial usage of my School, I revealed that boys who were considered to have had, from favouritism or otherwise, too lenient a dose of the rod, were subjected to an irritant of pepper or salt, according to circumstances, in order to equalize the justice or injustice of the relative cases. Probably it was something of this sort that led to the turpentine incident I have already referred to.

"And, oh! Joe—dear Joe—were *you* pickled?"

I had got the ugly part of my story told to my thinking—and I was boy enough to enjoy telling the remainder.

"Oh no! I wasn't pickled. I got off by fighting——"

"What—fighting the whole lot?"

"No—it's like this—you can be pickled, or you can fight another boy bigger than yourself. I chose Spendergrass primus, to pay him out for complaining. And as soon as he had time to get all right after old Lasher, we fought behind the Cloister—that's where they fight—and I had a black eye, and he had two teeth loosened. But the dentist said they would tighten in again, and it didn't matter. Oh, Lossie, don't cry!"

For Lossie was crying, though she said she wasn't. "It's only the dazzle of the sun," she said. "There must be a rainbow somewhere behind us—look at the drops on the grass, how they sparkle like diamonds!" But it hadn't been a rain-drop that I saw fall on the hair bracelet. However, Lossie cleared up like the April shower, and the sun shone again.

"Boys are all alike," said she. "You were just like Nolly when he went to Eton, before you went away in January. And now you're just like him at the end of his first term. You know, Joe, you wouldn't have told me all these horrors if I hadn't pumped you so. But I won't blow you up, dear, so you needn't be frightened. Let's follow them on to the Spaniards."

For we had stopped during this conversation at the Scotch Firs at the edge of the Heath. Lossie had sat down on a wooden seat while we talked, and I had been making little heaps of sand and fir-cones at the knotty exposed root of a fir-tree close by. I never see a fir-cone now without thinking of that afternoon at Hampstead.

"I don't think Eton can be half as bad as this horrible place where you are, Joe," said Lossie, as we started again. "Nolly never told me anything like what you have to-day—I should like to murder that abominable old what's-his-name?"

"What, old Lasher!" said I. "Why, old Lasher! He's really not half bad, when you come to know him."

"Well, then—that Mr. Packer that got you flogged by telling a lie about you. I certainly should like to murder *him*. Come now, Joe, say you hate him!"

"Hate old Packer?" said I. "Fancy any one hating old Packer! But of course his trousers are too tight, and he's rather an Ass——"

Lossie had a laugh for this, and I felt we were getting to rights again. "Bother old Packer's tight trousers," said she. "Didn't I say so before, and you make me say it again? But now—how about the other boy? Don't you hate *him?*"

"What, Spendergrass?" cried I, and my surprise was real, finding vent in a quite extravagant amount of accent on his first syllable. "Why, Spendergrass is going to ask his Governor to ask me down to Princes Risborough in June—Larkshall's his Governor's country house. We had no end of a spree, him and me, etc., etc." And I was glad to get on to a narrative of this spree, and thus to avoid further revelations of school-discipline. But Lossie was very absent, and didn't seem to profit by it. She interrupted me suddenly at a most critical and interesting crisis in the spree—

"But, Joe dear, I do want to know—are they going on like this with you always? Never mind about how you blacked their noses with cork now—you can tell me that after. Suppose you're at school there three or four years, won't it get any better?"

"Oh, it's all right! Besides, any pupil they think they can run for the Thurtell Scholarship they let off easily—because they don't want to upset him and spoil his chances."

Lossie stopped and looked round at me with an expression of bewilderment.

"Do you mean to say, Joe, that when a boy *isn't* trying for any Scholarship, or what would bring credit to the school—because that's the idea, I suppose?"

"Yes—that's the idea. The Thurtell sends a boy to Oxford, and if he distinguishes himself of course that brings more pupils to St. Withold's."

"Well, then—that *then,* they *do* want to upset him and spoil his chances?"

"Oh, no! At least, that's not the way to put it. It's the system!"

"What's the system?"

"Well! The system Dr. Lasher was brought up in."

"And I don't think," said Lossie, "that Dr. Lasher would do any credit to Pandemonium, which is the same system, I should say."

"But please, Lossie, you won't tell the Doctor all this——"

"There they are on in front stopping for us! Come along, Joe!"

Whether the Doctor was told, I never knew, but of one effect which this conversation would have (and did have) I felt as certain at the time as if Lossie had put her intentions into words—namely, that Joey Thorpe would never go to a public school. For the Doctor would never run counter to any wish of Lossie's. And I am sure that she for her part believed that what was true of St. Withold was very nearly true, if not quite, of all public schools. This was encouraged by Nolly's obvious reticence about Eton, which was in truth nothing but the natural attitude of a boy towards his sister. Had Lossie been my own sister I doubt if I should have told her all I did. It turns on a very singular *nuance* of a boy's character—the one which decides what he will or will not consider to be sneaking. Perhaps as long as he realizes there are such things as meanness and the reverse, it does not so much matter how much his germ of a brain muddles the details. But that this particular confusion exists, that it is unmanly to reveal school secrets to sisters, I am convinced. Obviously it would have been easier for me to confess (to Spendergrass, for instance) that I had told all that story to Miss Lucilla Thorpe, than for him to tell me he had told it to his sister.

Anyhow, Lossie evidently got the idea that she had seen through me into the secrets of school-life, and that Nolly could have told similar tales had he chosen. And from this it came about that Master Joey passed through a curriculum of day-schools and private tutors instead of having his character formed on orthodox lines.

We got back just in time to avoid a shower, and then it became clear that what it is nowadays right to call the trend of events was in the direction of my stopping the night at The Limes. For there is a class specially favoured of Heaven, a sort of Chosen People, who always catch 'buses before you do; who get in at the Pit and Galleries of Theatres before the doors are opened; who monopolize standing-room, and remain inert and immovable in sitting-room; who succeed in seeing Races while you have to be satisfied with coat-tails and bustles. This class is of no age, no sex, no profession; in fact has no qualities whatever, except that of being Somebody Else. It is suspected of chuckling inwardly over your discomfiture, but otherwise is without passions. It was agreed at The Limes that this class would be sure to have taken all the places in the 'bus long before I got there, and that this was equally true of all dates of arrival. So it was determined that

I should stay the night, and I did. Surmises whether my Father would be anxious struck me as an odd attribute of high respectability when I thought to myself how different things were in our old days before the Building Trade was dreamed of! My Father was often away all night without notice given, and my Mother postponed belief in disaster quite contentedly.

Some young friends from close by were elicited by a three-cornered note from Sarita, and we spent a pleasant evening playing Pope Joan. It is a good game, and the board can be spun round and round rapidly, which seems to me to give it an advantage over other card-games with no boards. Incidentally, I may note that I very early deserted cards for chess, and never went back.

The Spencer family was a very late family in the morning apparently, for Lossie and I got the best part of an hour before any of them were visible. I really thought all the water in the urn on the sideboard would evaporate before an authentic tea-maker appeared, so impatient did it become. In fact, it once suddenly became quite snappish, owing to strained relations with its naphtha-lamp, and had to be soothed. This done, our conversation went on at the point of interruption:—

"I'm sure your Mother won't mind it, Joe, when once she gets a little into the way. And you know, after all, she won't have to work so hard as she has done."

"Oh, I suppose it 'll be all right." For of course at that early date everything was always going to be all right. "My Father says if the cook or the housemaid are bounceable, he'll square them up sharp, and send them packing in double-quick time."

"My dear boy, *that's* not the difficulty. Anybody can get rid of servants. They are not limpets or leeches. The trouble is to find the new ones. And your Mother will have to do that."

I felt I was in the presence of superior knowledge of the subject, so when I repeated again that Father thought it would be all right, I avoided details for fear of another destructive criticism.

"My upstairs Joey," said Lossie, inventing an expression to cover existing facts, "was snoring when I went in to see—at least he would have been snoring, if he'd been Aunty. I wasn't going to wake him, breakfast or no, and I shall hear him move, down here. We're just underneath."

"You didn't tell me what the Doctor said," said I, referring back to a præ-kettle-boiling stage of the conversation.

"Said you would be sure to choose for yourself when you were old enough—that you could go into your Father's business just the same for the next three or four years. And you had better have the full advantage of your schooling. You *may* get the Thurtell Scholarship, you know——"

"And what did Father say?"

"Said the berth would always be wacant for the Nipper, and you certainly did seem to have an aptitood for the Clarsicks." From which it must not be inferred that any disrespect was meant to my Father; as the fact is Lossie and I were so confidential that we made no bones of comparing notes about our seniors' individualities. But lines were drawn. Lossie would never have mimicked my Mother's pronunciation any more than I should the Doctor's. I was very free in the matter of Aunt Izzy.

"I say, Lossie," said I.

"What, Joe?"

"Which do you think your Governor would really like best?"

"Well, dear, you know what Papa is! Of course as he happened to be able to give you his Nomination, or whatever they call it, at this horrible genteel Wackford Squeerses, why, he would like you to have the full benefit of it, and perhaps go up to the University. But I'm sure if he knew how Dr. Lasher went on——"

I stopped Lossie with a voluble disclaimer. Dr. Lasher was the most awfully jolly old boy, and the System was the most awfully jolly old System, and St. Withold was the most awfully jolly of old Saints. Heaven forbid that Lossie should draw any opposite conclusions from what I told her yesterday. I ascribed a great liberality to St. Withold on the ground that I had not hesitated to tell so much about him, suggesting that Nolly could tell a lot worse things about Eton if he chose. It was just the same in all other schools, only heaps worse, and the boys wouldn't tell. In fact, I did all I could to erase the impression I had given, seeing the matter now in its relation to a possible disappointment for Dr. Thorpe. I sternly resolved in my own mind that, whatever nightmare of the Saint's fiancée's nine-fold brood should dominate my school-dream, nothing on earth should wring a complaint from me about it. For the future all should be silence.

I also perceived that Lossie would be more likely to tell her Governor nothing about what I had revealed if I laid stress on the Oxford possibility. I was able in this connection to produce evidence of favourable predictions about myself in the school though it was only my first term. Capp tertius had overheard a conversation about me, and a wager laid by no less a person than Mr. Packer of the tight trousers;—that if I stopped on long enough I should get the Thurtell, and end with a double-first at Oxford.

I told this to Lossie, and Mr. Packer seemed to go up in her good opinion.

"Well then, Joe," said she. "That's how it's to be! *I* shan't tell Papa about the School, and I hope you'll be let off easy next term. And you'll be a double-first, won't you?"

How very curious some common figures of speech are, if you think of them seriously! Why on earth should I have asked Lossie in reply if that wouldn't be a lark? That was my comment, but I got no answer. For Sarita Spencer came downstairs in a hurry, pretending she had never been behind time on any previous occasion. I wasn't able to tell myself exactly why I wondered that Miss Sarry should be so well kissed on both sides by Lossie when she entered the room in the hurry aforesaid, but I perceived a fitness in the equilibrium, owing to her resemblance to the isosceles triangle. Had Lossie kissed one side only, I should have felt that she had got slightly scalene. For everything Lossie did left an effect behind it, for me! This may seem nonsense, but it is to my mind true, and I am not writing this for the general public.

"Good-morning, Master Vance," said Sarry, and proceeded to make the tea, to the great gratification and relief of the kettle, the extinction of whose lamp was like a Proclamation of Peace. "Five because Mamma never takes tea, and one for the Pot, six. Now I can see about your omnibus. What's the clock in the passage? Twenty minutes to nine—it must be fast! Bakewell! Bakewell! What's the time by the kitchen clock?" A reply from the bowels of the earth answered this enquiry over the stair-rail outside. "I thought it was fast—twenty-five minutes! Papa must put it back next time Mamma goes out, because he won't push the minute-hand back, and it goes round and round and strikes every time and gets on Mamma's nerves. Let's see! Stop a minute! You can't catch the half-past nine 'bus now. You might get the ten-o'clock one—would that do?"

"He can catch any 'bus," said Lossie, "if they go every half-hour—can't you, Joe?"

"Now, isn't that just like Lossie?" said Sarita.

"What's like Lossie?" said Mr. Spencer, appearing. "Good-morning, Lossie! What is it that is like Miss Lucilla Thorpe?"

"Saying boys can catch any omnibus because they go every half-hour," said Sarry, rather cutting her father off short. Mr. Spencer's method of receiving this was legal and irritating.

"My young friend here," said he, "appears to me to be only one boy. Am I to understand that all boys go every half-hour?"

"Nonsense, Papa, you know what I mean quite well! Grizzle dear (for Grizzle was appearing), ask over the stairs if these are our eggs."

"If you and Grizzle don't know, how can you expect the cook to know?" said Mr. Spencer. And Sarry said, "Well, for the life of me I can't tell what you're all laughing at." Because we *were* laughing. And we didn't laugh less when Grizzle came in, saying, "Bakewell says they *are* our eggs." But Sarry didn't seem any the wiser, and reverted to the omnibus. I checkmated this vehicle by a remark I had been waiting to make, to the effect that I intended to walk all the way. Clearly then there was nothing to arrange, and Lossie said, "You silly boy, you might just as well have said so at once!"

It was some time after this when I was just going to say good-bye and start, that Sarry was taken with a fit of laughter that threatened serious consequences. "Oh, Lossie dear," she said, after recovering respiration, "it was because I saw what Papa meant all of a sudden! Just as if Grizzle and I were hens!"

Lossie started with me to show me the shortest way. We talked about Sarita. I was emphatic in my approbation, and couldn't repeat too often that the young lady was awfully jolly. But in spite of this I remember then wondering at Lossie's adoration of her. And as she scarcely comes into this narrative except as a recipient of a number of letters which afterwards passed into my possession, and which I now have here, it is only this inability to account for Lossie that has made me piece together my scraps of recollection of Sarry, so as to obtain if possible some light on the problem of her fascination. For myself, I never could understand it; but probably every one else was right and I was wrong.

I said good-bye to Lossie, and started for home; very glad to have avoided any more about St. Withold's.

CHAPTER XVI

JOE'S FATHER'S HAT AGAIN. AND HOW HIS MOTHER DIED. A LETTER OF LOSSIE WRITTEN A YEAR AFTER. OF HIS FATHER'S GRIEF AND HIS OWN—THE STORY OF HIS FATHER'S COURTSHIP TOLD TO JOE—OF THE PURE CAIRN MAGORRACHAN MOUNTAIN DEW, AND HOW JOE LAY AWAKE BECAUSE OF THE SAME.

On re-reading a passage of this MS. I perceived that I had after all, in the face of my own protest, dismissed my Father's Hat with too short and disrespectful a notice. I am, you see, an old stager, and to me the whole of the Past presents itself as one huge shiny stovepipe Hat, with Proletarians and Roturiers crawling round it on their stomachs in abject abasement. I am told that new readings of the Book of Life have been sanctioned by the Authorities, whoever they are, and that a Bank Director has been seen in a billycock! But I cannot nerve myself to accepting such a state of things on hearsay, and must stick to the memories of boyhood.

I refer again to this Hat (observe that I always give it a capital), not with any hope of doing it justice, but because it was an outward and visible sign of a changed order of things. During the whole of the period between my first experience of Lossie and her letter (which I am coming to), my Father was what is described in English, and in English only, as sober. In other countries people are normal, or drunk. In England an abnorma condition demands the adjective sober, and occasionally gets it The change, which had been procured by the simple incident of two months' enforced abstention, was little less than promotion to Paradise for my Mother. I myself felt it more through my relation with her than in any other way. For to me whatever my Father did was right. Had his drunkenness led to brutality to my Mother, or myself, it might have been otherwise. But it showed itself almost entirely in Bacchanalianism proper, and fights with equivalent males of his own species.

I cannot quite bring myself to write that in the Hat period my Mother became kinder to me. It would imply a previous unkindness. That would be false. But there was a sort of dif ference between her two forms of kindness. I suppose the withdrawal of a cause of anxiety gave her more license to spoil me. Or was it my new position? I don't think it was. I think it was that the happier she was, the more motherly she could be. Have you never seen women of her surroundings, whose brutal males and sordid lives have made them cruel to their children? If there was any trace of this in my Mother, it disappeared at the Hat transition, and left her what I remember her when I started to go back to school at the end of that happiest of fortnights at home.

"Good-bye, my precious darling boy, good-bye!" said she. And I said my say of farewells, and ended with "Now cut away indoors, or you'll get your cough worse." For she was coughing a good deal. And then my Father said, "Cough 'll be all right, if the *dam* doctor will go and 'ang himself. There's nothing amiss with the cough."

Here is the letter of Lossie, written more than two years later.

"POPLAR VILLA, Sept., 1854.

"I wonder why it is, dear, that I always deluge you with letters in September. No, I don't—I mean I don't wonder. Because September in London is such a nice peace and quiet time. The leaves blow about and Violet goes to stay with friends in the country, and if we're in London at all I'm left alone with Papa and Joey, and look after the housekeeping myself instead of Aunty.

"One does feel so brutal when one finds it such a relief to get rid of one's family. One is really very fond of them, but say what one will it is like a breath of fresh air to get what poor Joe Vance's father calls 'shet o' the whole bilin'.' The only section, or segment or drop (I don't know how a bilin' is divided) that I have any cause to find fault with is poor dear Aunty. She's gone to a Congress of an Association for the Promotion or Suppression of some Virtue or Vice, I'm not sure which! She's an Honorary Secretary, and some big bundles have come from the printer—but they must be forwarded at once or I would open one and get out a Prospectus to send you. How ever the Society can get along with an Honorary Secretary who has an ear-trumpet I don't know! However, Papa says he knows of an acting Secretary of a leading Institute in London who is stone deaf but in receipt of £500 a year! But then he reads the Times all day long and never interferes in the business of the office, and I am sure Aunty never didn't interfere with anything. However, I really ought to be deeply thankful now she's taken up Homœopathy. Papa says Homœopathy is 'an Allotropic form of letting other people's insides alone,' and really before it turned up she *was* trying. Because there was no way of heading her off, or escaping diagnosis at the hands of Dr. Hillyer except taking an eighth part of any bottle that hadn't been emptied, no matter what, as a compromise. She always smelt it and confirmed its efficacy from recollection, also remembering the principal ingredients, 'It's that nice prescription of Dr. Hillyer's. It's only a little Ammonia and Chlorodyne and Gentian and Bark, and *nothing* that can *possibly* hurt. And of course you won't mind *me,* dear, no one does! But I'm *sure* you ought either to *take* something or let Dr. Hillyer *see* you.' It really was just like that, and now it is better a deal—that is to say, one escapes being poisoned, but the embarrassment of having to shout one's symptoms on the stairs or other public places is rather increased than otherwise. Because she has got a precious and infallible work called 'Jahr's Handbuch,' which Papa calls the Valetudinarian's Delight, and which bristles with symptoms which would make one envious of leprosy if one had them. She stopped me a little while ago just as I was going into the street, with Jahr in her hand, to enquire whether the following described my case—'Itching in the nostrils. Titillation in the membranes of the nasal canal. Sensation as of centipedes on the occiput, or of a large heavy object in the glottis, accompanied with wheezing, snoring, or choking. Incessant sneezing. Metempsychosis and Asphyxia. Tendency to jump, start and use bad language. Sensation of a swarm of bees in the larynx. Caryatids.' That's just exactly what she read very loud to me and a policeman's back, standing at our gate—all except the medical terms, some of which I have forgotten. Don't you think my substitutes elegant? You may fancy what this work reads like when it is necessary to choose between Silicea and Carbo Vegetabilis for my greedy little brother, when he has indulged too freely in the pleasures of the table. Of course I always say the symptoms are exactly right, and in the above case laid special claim to the sensation of a swarm of bees, and when I came back from posting my letter found two tumblers of the weakest possible grog with paper over them—one teaspoonful every four hours of each, alternately. She makes some concession to my feelings on the subject of High Dilutions, and (at great risk to myself, she says) allows me to have Mother-Tinctures. Hence the Alcohol, which has the same relation to real Grog that a glass of water too often has to beer, owing to previous associations and ineffectual dry rubs.

"I wouldn't nag on this way at poor Aunty, only she really did aggravate Papa and me so when poor Mrs. Vance was dying. You must have seen her here—indeed, I am sure you did, a twelvemonth since—and she said that as soon as ever easy circumstances permitted she should go and have a breath of sea-air. And you fancied she meant that funds were low, and I knew better and explained. She was a dear good woman, and we never could get her to give up calling me Miss Lucilla and Aunty Ma'am, and insisting on standing up till she was actually pushed into a chair. She was Joe Vance's mother, you know, and we were all grieved to lose her. And I daresay Aunty meant well—indeed, I'm sure she did—but really to expect her to see a Homœopathic Physician secretly and take clandestine globules was too much! And then to go and tell Papa that Mrs. Vance was really yearning for the globules and said that they were the only things that did any good, and that it was all the hard incredulity of that Sadducee of a husband of hers that prevented it! Papa actually spoke to Joe's father about it, but it wasn't any use, because Mr. Vance couldn't be got to look at the matter from any point of view except its relation to a possible turn-up, or set-to between Dr. Hillyer and Mr. Knowles, Aunty's Homœopath, in his back-garden. He seems to have caught at this idea, and cherished it, for happening to meet Mr. Knowles at our house he (having just heard his name) addressed him thus: ''Appy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Price. When are you going to have it out with my medical attendant? You're both on you light weights, and nothing could be fairer! Say the word and I'll make the ap'intment.' Then as Aunty *would not let* Papa alone about it, he tried speaking to Dr. Hillyer in confidence, to persuade him to wink at some sort of arrangement. 'But,' said Papa to me after, 'Dr. Hillyer turned purple and couldn't articulate, and I was obliged to apologize for mentioning it and gave it up.' Poor Mr. Vance—you know although he's so prosperous now, he's entirely ignorant and uneducated—he hates all ''oarspital carackters,' as he calls them, and says the minute you let them feel your pulse, orf you go with your symptoms and then you may just as well order your coffin and chuck it!

"I began writing this letter meaning to tell you about Vi and her young German—I really do think it's going to come to something this time (here follows an account of the gentleman to whom Violet was engaged at this date). . . . .

"Vi is very severe with me for never being engaged at all. I have explained to her that I take after our grandmothers, who had Admirers, for several of whom they had a True Regard, and one of whom after severe probation became the Man of their Choice, and if all went well, ultimately became our Grandpapa. She says it really cannot matter now what girls did who had their waists under their chins and no crinoline, and ringlets, nor men whose trousers were as tight as stockings and who had little tail-coats and frills to their shirts, and shaved close every morning. You should see *her* crinolines—every new one larger than the last! . . . . I must say I should not like to be engaged if the man was an idiot, or became one, and I felt it was my fault. If ever I am I mean to keep my promise and tell you exactly what he says when he proposes, because I shall refuse him civilly if he says anything too silly for me to report. What an interminable long letter this is getting!

"Poor darling little Joe Vance! It was just heartbreaking to see him when his mother died. But I did all I could to console the boy. It was too bad of that horrible old fool Capstick to try to make him more miserable than he need have been. I wish Joe's father had really done what he threatened—though I can't quite make out what it was, as Joe declines to repeat his Dad's language! I am not surprised. But I gather that Capstick (who is an advanced disciple of the Belief-at-Choice School) had certainly said to Mr. Vance, 'When you get to Hell, dear Sir, you'll find out you could have believed if you had chosen.' Fancy his talking that way, and in the presence of the boy, too! Such a nice lad he's growing to be, and simply getting on like wild-fire with his studies. He is developing a strong taste for mechanics, and threatens to forget all his classics as soon as he's done with them. . . .

"Your ever affectionate

"Lossie Thorpe."

I had read through many letters of Lossie's written during my early schooldays, among the contents of the bundle in my possession, before I came to the foregoing—but none containing anything that called for record about myself. Briefly, I may note that in these letters stories about my namesake Joey become scarcer and almost vanish—in which one may distinguish that his amusing babyhood is giving place to a rather wilful and selfish boyhood; that Vi was never very long without a love-affair on, but that they never took substantial form and purpose until the appearance of the young German; that Aunt Izzy's benevolent efforts for her fellow-creatures continued without the slightest consideration for the comfort of her victims, and that Lossie herself is distinctly growing up from fifteen to nineteen. But there chances to be very little allusion to me or mine; and this is made reasonable to me by my want of recollection of Sarita Spencer during this particular period. She could only have had a corresponding impression of me, so it was natural I should not occur in Lossie's correspondence with her until some new chord was sounded in what a striking writer (whose name I have forgotten) calls "the orchestration of our joint lives." A sad modulation, into a minor key, was pending in those of myself and my Father.

For before two years were completed of the seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years' lease of his new house, he was a widower. My Mother's cough, that was the last sound I heard when I returned to School after my first Easter Holidays, had gone on for more than a twelvemonth on a tenancy at will—its will!—promising each week to go next week; each week declaring in the face of evidence that it was a little better; and each month being obliged to admit that it was a great deal worse. When I returned to School for the second Christmas term I wore a new suit of mourning and the black gloves the Undertaker had vouchsafed to me at my Mother's funeral.

How well I remember going back with my Father to his lonely house; and as soon as we had shaken ourselves free of the mourning coach and its beery satellites, going instinctively to the little smoking snuggery at the end of the passage, to avoid the sight of all the expensive furniture which he had purchased more and more as my Mother's illness had increased. "It was all o' no use, Nipper dear!" said he to me as he closed the dining-room door in passing. I really believe he thought that settees covered with Utrecht velvet, walnut chiffoniers with curvilinear marble tops, buhl, marqueterie, ormolu, and so forth had in them the properties of antidotes to pulmonary disease. He had looked upon himself and the Doctor as working to opposite ends; the Doctor to compassing my Mother's death by means of illegible prescriptions, and himself to counteracting them by expensive upholstery from Tottenham Court Road. The Apothecary he regarded as an originally sinless tradesman with a very red lamp, misled by the said prescriptions into conspiracies against health and life. He certainly ascribed Death to doctors and nurses, except in cases of extreme old age. Even when he imputed to patients that their own carelessness, obstinacy, and neglect of his advice was a contributary cause, he always made the Nurse and Doctor primarily responsible. "If," said he, reproachfully, "they'd only have let her enjy herself and get out and amongst 'em and have a hearty laugh, as the sayin' is, instead of their stinkin' prescriptions—*she'd* have done well enough! As if I didn't know your Mother after all these years!"

He declined the too-late-for-lunch meal that awaited us in the dining-room, saying that I should have to go and eat something or—and stopped short of adding that my Mother would be displeased.

"Never mind, Nipper," said he, "we shall get it all square in time," meaning that he would get to realize the new state of things. "Help me off with this here coat, and ketch hold on the hat, and we'll have a peck in here, and a pipe—at least, I will. Young shavers like you don't have pipes." He subsided into the extensive leather armchair with brass studs which was his special property; and leaving me to justify the chops which the slavey (as he called her) had deflected from their first destination, lit his pipe and went on with his reflections.

"All, as I say, o' no use, Nipper! Two picters—engravings, I should say—after Landseer—both the same subject. *Proof before Letters* was the name he said, though I can't see any Letters in the picters myself. And not so much as hung in their places yet! There's the picter-cord waiting all ready, ever since that day I told you when she let the slavey bring up her breakfast to her in bed—that was the day after I carried her upstairs. And I didn't have 'em put up not till I should know she was sure to come down the same day, or they'd have told her and she'd have fretted to come down and see 'em. Very fond of stags she was, and saw 'em in Richmond Park; and that was why I bought this picture of Proof before Letters. It's a stag in the water—you saw it? Just before you went back after the summer holidays."

I had seen it, but only by tilting it forward and looking down at it—not the best way of seeing pictures. I did not know at that time what a proof before letters was, but I fancied there might have been some mistake in taking this for the title. It didn't matter then—nothing mattered! My Father continued:

"Why, I *met* her in Richmond Park, the very first time ever I saw her. I was along of a young gal I was walking out with at that time, by name Maria Stevens. I believe she had an operation for her eyes after and they came straight—squinted then she did, at the time I'm a-thinkin' of. And says she, 'There's young Cripps and his young woman—here close to us,' says she, 'what are you a-staring at Wimbledon Common for?' And says I, 'She's a handsome young wench, anyhow!'—For I tell you, Joe, your Mother was the prettiest girl at eighteen I ever see, before or since."

He had talked himself into the past, and remained silent, puffing at his pipe, till I said, "Yes, Daddy, and then?"

"Oh—ah—yes, it's the Nipper! Where was I a-telling? To be sure—'She's a handsome young wench,' says I, 'anyhow!' And Maria Stevens she tossed her head, being, as you might say, miffed, and 'P'r'aps,' says she, 'you'd like her better than me?' 'No, Maria,' says I, 'the likes of her is not for the likes of me.' 'Ho, *that's* the view you take,' says Maria, and just flings off and leaves me, and off she goes to your mother and young Cripps. We was all young together, Joe, you know," said my Father, apologetically.

"But what happened, Daddy dear?" said I. "Did Maria Stevens come back?"

"They all came across together, and young Cripps he says to me, civil-like, that he'd seen me at the private bar at the Goat and Compasses. And whether he had I did not know—neither do I to this moment. Maybe he had, maybe otherwise! I said o' coorse he had. Then your Mother and me we dropped back, for the purpose like on her part, but I was a little afraid of her at first go-off. 'Sorry to hear you've had words, Mr. Vance,' says she. 'Why, you see,' says I, 'she took me up so short, Miss Stevens did.' And I told her all about it. And then your Mother says: 'Well, now—Mr. Vance, did you ever? Only to think what strange coincidences do occur when not looked after'—(I remember her very words). 'I truly assure you without exaggeration that that very expression and no other is the very one Reuben Cripps made use of relatin' to Miss Stevens the minute I asked him if perhaps he wouldn't prefer her, squint and all? "The likes of her isn't for the likes of me"—only fancy!' And she was a-calling out to them all about it, but they'd got out o' hearing. And I never see either of 'em again from that day forward."

According to my belief, youth is unsympathetic in all matters, but especially in its feelings towards its predecessors' youth. It looks on it as not having been quite the genuine article, although it may have seemed so at the time to previous persons, betrayed into misapprehension by surrounding circumstances. I cannot disguise it from myself now that, horribly egotistical as it seems, I felt only a qualified interest in my Father's recollections. Of course I affected a strong one, so far as my grief left life in me to profess anything; but I would quite as soon have indulged it in silence. Yet I must have listened, or I should scarcely recollect it all so well. It is odd, but for all the many years that I am now older than my Father was then, I still regard him as a genuine example of a grown-up person, and my present self as rather an impostor in that respect.—I wonder if any one who reads this will recognize the feeling?

My Father smoked on, looking at the fire, when he finished speaking, until I tried to say something, more because I thought he might wish to go on talking than because I thought I should really listen.

"Poor little beggar," said he. "A little chap mustn't cry his heart out—come here, old man! Come and sit on this here knee—not too old for that yet—hay, boy? But don't cry like that! Mother wouldn't like it——" For indeed I had rather broken down. But I pulled myself together, and asked where he and Mother went then. It seemed as good a thing to say as anything else.

"Well, my dear, your Mother and I we walked about the Park looking for young Cripps and Maria Stevens, or pretended to it. And I'll be bail they walked about and made believe to look for we! But they never found us, nor yet we them—and I warn't sorry. And she warn't sorry. But she kep' on a-sayin': 'Dear me, wherever now *can* Reuben Cripps have gone? And Miss Maria Stevens?'—'Mr. Cripps is 'artily welcome to my share of M'riar,' says I, 'as long as he don't come interrupting other people.'—'Then you mustn't run away and leave me alone, Mr. Vance,' says your Mother. Nor yet I didn't, dear Nipper. I saw her home safe to her place—a house Bayswater way, where she was in the Nursery, two Nurses being kept. But I didn't go right to the door for fear the upper housemaid, who knew Cripps, should distinguish me out from him.

"I was then in the market-gardening out Chiswick way, and very nearly lost my place I did that time, owing to seeing your Mother home—and having to walk back made me oversleep, beside lyin' awake as I remember. And loadin' up for Covent Garden towards Midsummer is early work. The old Governor was in a tidy rage!

"We didn't make no appointment for her next Sunday out, but she mentioned which it would be, and that any one who came for her was to please ask for Jane, though her name was Ellen; she being called Jane owing to two Ellens in the house already inside the family. I didn't ask, but she saw me across the way. And when we came back from Greenwich Park that afternoon, she took me to her aunt's to make me reg'lar. And her aunt she took exception to me for not being Cripps. And Cripps I wasn't!—she was right there.

"We kept company a long while, me and your Mother, before ever we thought of marrying—don't know exactly what we should have had to eat! But likewise it was her family, where she was nursemaid, seein' that the little girl, Ellen, couldn't bear to part with her, nor yet she with the child. It wasn't till she died three year after that I persuaded your Mother to marry. And then we began at Stallwood's Cottages. I wouldn't mind being back at Stallwood's Cottages—I'd try to make her happier than I had used to, if I could start fair again!

"No, Nipper dear, I know she never complained—nor likely to, being what she was. But I wasn't what I might have been, and a half-pint was often enough to make the difference. When I married your Mother I was as steady a young chap as you'd need to see in a month o' Sundays. But I got upset like, and I remember when it was. Your Mother couldn't come to time after her first, and me going away early and Mrs. Packles often coming in late (though most kind and considerate) to make me up a bit of breakfast, I found it 'andiest to swallow half-a-pint at an early house on the way to work, and not to be fussin' about eatables. If I had chanced to have an illness I might have got knocked off the habit again, but I hadn't the luck, and it grew on me and got worse, and your dear Mother she had a tryin' time."

My Father smoked in silence for a while with his eyes on the fire, as mine were. It was a fine oily coal, and made beautiful gas volcanoes, budding out tar for lava. We both watched one of these until it blew itself out with its own efforts, and suddenly became a jet of smoke coming straight into the room.

"Give it a knock with the poker, Nipper," said he. And when I had done so, and the broken lump of best Wallsend, selected, had risen to the occasion and given a splendid blaze, he went on:

"It wasn't that I was in any ways like Packles, or sim'lar to him for the matter o' that. I expect you was too young, Joey, to remember Packles being bound over, in consideration of violence to Mrs. P., and offering resistance to the Police?"

Oh dear, yes! I remembered all about it—and that even at my early age (six, I think) I had been impressed by the unnecessary sensitiveness of the Police force, Mr. Packles having been easily carried away—one might almost say wafted—by a giant in a blue uniform, who bore him off to retribution by the scruff of his neck at arm's length, as though he had been a cat.

"Fancy the Nipper recollecting that! Then I'll be bail you can recollect—but in coorse you can recollect—all about the Sweep I got the worse by over the Canal Bridge by Collyer's Rents? Somewhiles I think to myself I'd like to be even with that Sweep, somewhiles that I ought to make him a handsome consideration. For it was that two months on my back that kept me to reasonable allowances of liquor, and your Mother she pointed out to me that she should cut her throat if I was to go back on the drink. Yet, mind you, Joey, I'd 'a' been well pleased to be even with that Sweep, whilst your Mother was here to know of it. It don't so much matter now!—more by token the pore devil's lost the use of his eye, I'm told. Boy chucked a bit of broken glass at him that very day——"

Should I tell him I was the boy? I was just on the point of doing so, when the thought occurred to me that if he only regretted his inability to settle scores with Peter Gunn because it would have pleased my Mother, his own satisfaction at hearing of my achievement would be impaired, if not destroyed, by knowing that my Mother could not share it, and that I had never told her of it during her life. An abortive suggestion (of some passing Imp, I suppose) that I could pretend I had told her, and she kept the secret for my sake, not to involve me with the Sweep, did certainly cross my mind; but I rejected it as impracticable, and held my tongue as before. My Father continued:

"Yes—he lost the use o' that eye, did Gunn. Thought it was come all to rights and it got a back-turn a twelvemonth after, I was told—rather hard on the beggar! Anyhow, he got a mark to carry that day, and I got off better than scot-free, as you might say. A little stiffness at times, and what they call shy-atica now and then, but nothing to set against the new go-off I got! At least so your Mother thought, and I expect she was right—she mostly was——

"And I *have* done well, that's the truth, since the Doctor set me a-going on his drains at Popular Villa. You'll remember all about that, Nipper? And you a-telling and a-telling about Miss Lossie and the pears? Never thought in those days that I should live to write Christopher Vance on the front of a cheque, and indeed hardly on the back of one. And now——!"

He made a long pause, and then said: "After all, p'r'aps it's not so much Gunn I ought to thank as the party that put down that brick-on-edge for me to tumble on. Perhaps the Finger of Providence put it there, as Capstick was a-sayin'. There was no call to stand it edgewise that I can see, anyhow!

"You touch that bell, Nipper, and we'll make the artful Slavey get us a cup o' tea. You may have the tea, and I'll get out the whiskey-bottle your dear Mother kep' in the left-hand sideboard cupboard, for to resort to if the Doctor didn't come when sent for. I'll just go up and get the keys. Tell the young gal Tea——"

The epithet applied to the slavey by my Father was not because she was supposed to have any special skill in her own trade—on the contrary, the cook, who first applied the adjective to her, wished it to be understood as referring to artfulness in evasion of official undertakings, and an undue cultivation of the society of young tradesmen. My Mother, on the contrary, liked this girl, and said if artful hussies were no worse than Feener, she could put up with them. The cook retreated on her entrenchments, saying, "Well, Ma'am, I jedge a young girl by her Grates."—My Mother was unconvinced, and went on putting up with Feener, which wasn't a surname, but short for Seraphina. Her full name was actually Seraphina Dowdeswell, but it seemed incredible to me at the time—though I became convinced of it afterwards.

I told this young gal Tea, and she cleared away the remains of lunch as a step towards it, pausing a second to remark that Master had eaten nothing; and he ought to try, but she knew how hard it was to get anything down. The poor girl was really very sympathetic, having been very fond of my Mother; and had evidently been crying. But still she was human, and I felt certain that she was working round towards an exposition of her own feelings when she lost her Aunt Sarah at Teddington. As this old party had been dying slowly during the last thirteen (in a life of ninety-seven) years, the parallel was not a happy one. So I didn't encourage Feener, but sat in silence tapping a new lump of coal with the poker. Feener tried a conjecture that perhaps Master would take some tea, and I must persuade him. Not being by nature morose, and feeling obliged to say something, I said I thought he was going to have some whiskey and water, and had gone to find the bottle.

"Well, now," exclaimed Feener, "I am that glad you mentioned it! Why, there's hardly a glassful left! And it was only one bottle at a time Missis liked to have in the house——"

"I suppose you can get another?"

"If I was to run this minute, Master Joseph, I might just catch the last shutter up at Viney & Backhouse's, and it's only theirs your Father will touch, being that particular! It's the Pure Cairn Magorrachan Mountain Dew, and not to be had at the bars; not even at the North Pole!"

"But it's not seven o'clock yet, and they'll never shut before seven—never mind the tea till you come back." So off went Feener.

I should have gone myself, but I had not enough cash; and neither Viney nor Backhouse would have known me from Adam. Feener, of course, commanded credit, being well known. My Father returned a moment after she left—

"Where's the Tea, old man?" said he; "I've got my whiskey and the Nipper hasn't got his Tea—what's Celestina a-doin' of?"

It was not in my Father's nature ever to accept any one's own version of his name. So he elected to call this girl Celestina. I said she had gone to get another bottle of whiskey.

"There's plenty in this here bottle," said he, "seein' I've only just drawn the cork! What's the young wacancy a-thinkin' of?"

I explained that she appeared to have seen a nearly empty bottle, and that she had an idea that there was never more than one in the house, by my Mother's wish.

"Nor more there ever has been," said my Father, with some reminiscence of his peculiar indescribable manner. "Nor more there ever has been, unless you count a bottle a bottle afore the cork's took out of it. Accordin'ly to me, a bottle ain't there at all until you can drink it. And I've never had two bottles open at once in this house. There was a teaspoonful in the other bottle little Clementina saw, but I swallowed it down before I opened this."

I felt an indescribable chill at the quick, and I think he knew it, for he added:—

"Never you trouble, Nipper dear! It came to exactly the same thing, or your old Father wouldn't have done it. You cheer up!"

My faith in him was so strong that this view came easily in, and the chill went off. All the same, as I lay awake that night I remembered his prevarication, long ago, about the half-pint at the Roebuck, on the day of the Sweep.

CHAPTER XVII

AN INEXCUSABLY LONG LETTER OF MISS LOSSIE'S—IT TELLS HOW SHE ADVOCATED THE CAUSE OF TEMPERANCE MORE SUCCESSFULLY THAN POOR MR. CAPSTICK, WHOSE INTENTIONS WERE GOOD, BUT WHO WAS LACKING IN TACT. AND OF HOW MR. VANCE POURED THE CAIRN MAGORRACHAN MOUNTAIN DEW ON THE PARLOUR FIRE.

THE following letter from Lossie to Miss Spencer shows how soon I had reason for further uneasiness about my Father and the whiskey-bottle. It is dated months later. After some other matter, of no interest to us, it goes on thus:

"Jan. 12, 1855.

"It's so surprising to me that you don't remember seeing Joe Vance's Mother that afternoon. It was in the Spring of last year, and we had callers, and Mrs. Vance got up to go because she said there were some gentlefolks coming. Then Aunty insisted on her stopping till she brought her down a bottle of cough-mixture that Vi had refused to take because it had ether in it. Don't you recollect Papa saying to her that she ought not to be out in such an awful East-wind, and she ought to go to Torquay? And she said she would go at once if it wasn't for her easy circumstances, meaning the encumbrances of her household. Because her husband with the best intentions persisted in increasing the number of servants, and fancied the more there were the less trouble his wife would have. Of course the exact reverse was the case. She said to me, 'Now, dear Miss Lossie, you take my advice and don't get married if it's to be easy circumstances. The minute circumstances are easy everything is difficult. If it wasn't, my dear, that I know it pleases Vance, I should be truly sorry there was such things as circumstances at all. We was happiest with none, at Stallwood's Cottages.' And the dear woman carried away the bottle in her muff, and I have no doubt took it all religiously. And when she had gone Vi gave way to her feelings about the absurdity of a man like Mr. Vance wanting four servants. 'I suppose,' said she, 'they'll be being the Christopher Vances next, and receiving—I shouldn't the least wonder!' Violet hates old

Vance, and when Joe is out of the way he catches it. However, all that is not what this letter is about, but only by the way. My pen runs on so. Nevertheless it's Vance *père* I was going to write about when I began, so it comes to the same thing in the end.

"Joe spoke to me more than once before he went back to school at Christmas, just after his Mother's funeral, about a fear he had had, now his Mother was gone, that his Father might relapse into his old habits—for there is no doubt that at one time he was much too free in his potations. As his poor dear wife said to me, 'Within living memory Mr. Vance has been two opposite poles.' I am quite certain that her mind was contentedly accepting two telegraph poles, or perhaps greasy poles at a fair, pointing in opposite directions, as the metaphor intended in this expression. Living memory must have meant five years or so—as she went on to say that for that term at least Temperance itself was not to be compared. But poor Joe told me that once or twice during her illness he had felt an alarm, and been afraid of the possible results of the cessation of her influence. He has written to me a good deal about it from school, and about a week since I had a most alarmed and terrified letter from the poor boy, enclosing part of one he had received from an old friend, the Rev. Mr. Capstick, giving an account of certain behaviour of his Father's. He must have been very violent to Mr. C., expressing forcible opinions about what the Apostle Paul would have done to show his resentment of Mr. C.'s assumption of priestly authority. Joe declined to give any abstract from the portion of Mr. C.'s letter he had cut out, but said in his own, 'You know, the governor does butter it on so very thick when he gets worked up, especially if it's old Capstick.' So I have to live uninformed. I won't send Capstick's letter, as I don't suppose Joe would like me to, but I can give an idea of it. It bristles with references to Scripture, threatening poor Vance that he shall be cast into outer darkness, where is wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. xxii. 13), and as a reference to Mr. V.'s trade as a Builder, contrives to drag in Nehemiah ii. 20, which has nothing whatever to do with the matter. He also has references to Daniel v. 4, 25, 26, 27, 28—Jeremiah, l. 2, 3—Habakkuk, ii. 15, which none of them appear to be relevant to the main point, which is briefly that Mr. Capstick has endeavoured (conscientiously, no doubt) to influence Mr. Vance to be more moderate about whiskey and water, and had affirmed that wine was a mocker, and strong drink was raging. To which V. replied that he seldom or never touched wine, and that he didn't consider whiskey and water *was* strong drink, unless there was a great deal more whiskey than water.

Joe's letter says he infers that the interview had ended by his Father losing his temper and kicking Capstick out of doors, which certainly would not have happened if he had not taken too much. He says he's been unusually easy with Capstick since Mrs. Vance died, on the ground of her friendship for him. Even when Capstick affirmed that her Salvation was by no means a Certainty, and that it would be presumptuous to think so, Mr. Vance merely referred to his having made her Salvation a condition precedent of believing anything at all. He then (according to Joe, who told me this sometime ago) wound up by saying, 'It's all fair and square, Master Capstick. What *you* say is, I shall be damned if I won't believe, and what *I* say is, I'll be damned if I will. So anyhow, I *am* damned!' I'm so glad Vi isn't looking over my shoulder.

"Well, dear, getting this letter from Joe, what ought I to have done? I'll tell you what I *did* do, and I hope you'll think it was right. I told Papa, and he said certainly I should do wisely to go and talk to Vance (which was my daring proposal). Much better, he said, than *his* talking to him, which would only put his back up, and do more harm than good. So I took my courage in both hands and went at once. I found the going easy enough. It was the talking!

"However, it had got to be done, and I had to do it. I constructed several hinges on my way to turn the conversation on, and forgot them all by the time I reached Clapham and found Mr. Vance's slavey (as he calls her) talking to the Butter in a high wind at the front gate. The men's dinner-bell was just ringing at the works, so Mr. Vance would be round almost directly. I was shown into his little room at the back, where he has lived almost entirely since his wife died, and had leisure looking out of the window at the gate of the works, and noting the stream of men pouring out to go to dinner, to wonder at the extraordinary succession of strokes of luck (or has it been genius?—that's what Papa thinks) that has developed such a great business concern in less than five years! For these men that I saw were only the men in the shops—engineers and carpenters and so on. How many he has on all his jobs altogether I can't guess. But Joe told me that the land on which he has built these shops will soon not be enough for Christopher Vance, Builder and Contractor, who began with a humble announcement of a desire to attend to Drains on the shortest notice. Only five years ago! Just fancy!

"I went on just fancying, and looking through the red glass of the window, which made the whole prosperous concern vermilion, till I was stopped by the voice of its proprietor, who when

I turned round to greet him naturally looked sickly greeny grey, clothes and all. Never mind, thought I, he'll gravitate back to a decent colour in time.

"'Lookin' at all my idle beggars turnin' out for their dinners, Miss Lossie? Goin' to have a pound of steak apiece, each o' those chaps is, and as much beer as he can hold full up.' Mr. Vance suggested the highest possible beer level with his finger across his throat. 'And then every livin' man-jack of 'em will go off sound asleep and come in late and be fined, I'll wager! And how do *you* do, Miss, and your respected father?' We did well. 'Has little Clementina offered you anything by way of refreshment—tea, corfy, cake, effervescin' drinks? Not so much as a dry biscuit, I'll be bail! She's a-colloguin' with a young shaver across the gate, and disregardin' the civilities. There's the cook goin' out arter her—I can hear her.'

"I couldn't identify the sound as he did, but I received an impression like that one has when a group of fowls, walking about on one course of its dinner, is suddenly scattered by the next course being flung over its backs. But Clementina, being dispersed, did not gather again, and the shaver went away whistling.

"'But, dear Mr. Vance, I've only just done breakfast. You know how late we are at home? I shouldn't be able to eat any lunch! For goodness' sake don't order anything for me.'

"'And bein' you ain't a young chap, I can't offer a cigar. Can't do anything, Miss Lossie, seemingly?' He looked dejected.

"'Yes, you can, Mr. Vance! You can ask me what I came here for at this early hour in the morning.'

"'What might it be then, Miss Lossie? That's asking.'

"'I've something to say to you, that's very difficult to say. I want you to help me.'

"Poor man! He was so good about it. He at once saw I was in distress about something, though he didn't guess what.

"'Goard bless my life and soul, Miss Lossie!' he burst out. 'Why, ain't I Joe Vance's father, and ain't you Doctor Thorpe's daughter what sent my boy to school, and for that matter did more to set me a-goin' than—well, then! than ever I deserved? Why, there's nothing, *nothing,* I wouldn't go halfway to for the like—— Halfway! All the way.' He stopped, and I think got a gleam. 'Am I to be blowed up for anything? If so, just you fire away free—I'll be bail I shall deserve it.'

"I was so grateful to him for the lift he had given, that I could hardly find it in my heart to attack him. But I went on—

"'I've had a letter from Joe, and he's very uneasy about you.'

"'What, my Nipper? Uneasy about me?' I think the gleam increased, but he waited for me to go on.

"'Joe had had a letter from Mr. Capstick, which had made him lie awake.' Mr. Vance flushed slightly, and he set his lips close for a moment. I could see his likeness to Joe, whom I had always supposed to be only like his mother. 'You mustn't be angry with old Capstick—he's only an old goose.' But Mr. Vance only looked partially mollified. 'What's the old goose been a-writin' of to my Nipper?' said he. Then as I was beginning to speak he stopped me with—'No, that ain't truthful of me—I know what he's been writing about. What did he say?'

"I gave a short extract of the letter, which indeed, minus the Scripture references, was not so very long in itself, and said what I could to soften matters. But the main fact was beyond softening. Mr. C. had made an organized attack, supported by quotations, at a moment when, according to him, Mr. V. was in a condition to supply an object lesson, and had paid the penalty of his rashness by being ejected from the house. I said I thought it was wrong and cruel of him to go away and write to a boy of fourteen as he had done—but he really was too great a fool for it to be worth Mr. Vance's while to think about him. 'But Joe evidently thinks,' I said, 'that you cannot have been quite yourself, or you would never have been so violent with him, as he says you have generally treated him as a sort of joke, and made game of him. You know,' I added, coming to the point, 'you must have been very violent with him to make him write to your own son that he thought it was——'

"'Whiskey,' said he.

"'That's what he said,' I replied. 'And Joe must have thought there was something in it, or he wouldn't have written to me about it at all. As Joe says in his letter, it doesn't at all follow that he's telling lies because he gives a reference to Scripture every two or three words.'

"'Don't it?' said Mr. Vance. 'Let's have a look at Joe's letter, Miss Lossie.' I explained that I had purposely left Joe's letter at home, not to be tempted to show it, as Joe would not expect me to show it, though I did not suppose that he would have been afraid to write exactly the same to him. But I wanted Joe always to write without reserve, and was not sure he would always do so, if I showed a letter of his, even to his Father. The point didn't seem to trouble the latter much—it may be that being, as he used to say, a short scollard, he did not care to decipher manuscript under inspection. Anyhow, he did not press it, and recurred to Capstick's veracity. He evidently thought this doubtful, but admitted that Scriptural quotations and accurate statements might creep occasionally into the same document, although it could only be regarded as accident when they did so.

“‘Psalm-singers is mostly liars,’ said he, ‘and Capstick’s no better nor worse than the rest of ’em. Still, as you say, Miss Lossie, he might be right, in the manner of speaking, by accident, once in a way. He might have said he’d seen me the worse for liquor when I was the worse but never showed it. And then he’d have been right by accident, but a liar for all that. Because his attitood in respect of me should have been that I was as sober as a Beadle—seemin’ so to him—hay, Miss Lossie?’

“I couldn’t help laughing at this. ‘Oh, Mr. Vance,’ said I. ‘You’re just like the pickpocket that said that it was true he’d stolen the pocket-handkerchief he was caught running away with, but that all the others in his pocket had got there by accident. You know that evening you turned Mr. Capstick out you must have been——’

“‘Drunk?’ said he. It always fell to him to say the word.

“‘Well—something like it. And of course you imagined you didn’t show it. Do you suppose—pardon me for speaking so freely—you said speak freely——?’

“‘Cut along, dear Miss Lossie,’ said he.

—“‘Do you suppose hundreds, thousands of the victims of this awful habit are not under the same delusion—that they don’t show it? Isn’t it true, rather, that one and all of them go on under that delusion until it is too late to go back, and then find they have been a byword of the neighbours for years? And if only one friend had come to them in time, and spoken the bold and honest truth, as I speak it to you now, for Joe’s sake and your own,—how different it might be, so often! It cannot be too late now for you, for as far as I know no one fears it but Joe—at least no one has said anything to me.’ I paused, for I had a misgiving that I was weakening my own advocacy, and giving a sort of license to go on a little until public attention was attracted. But I don’t think I did. ‘You know, Mr. Vance,’ I went on, ‘it is only because I believe Joe’s fears are a little exaggerated that I see any use in speaking to you about it at all. If I really thought you had got into anything like a habit of——’

“‘Boozing?’ said he, saving me the ugly word again.

“‘That sort of thing,’ I replied, and then went on—‘I shouldn’t think anything I could say would be of any avail at all. But all this is only since——’

“‘My wife died. Yes, my dear. And right you are, all along the line. Stop a half-a-minute!' He went to a writing-table at the window I had seen the vermilion view through, and brought out a bundle of accounts.

"'Here we are—Viney & Backhouse, Wine Merchants to H. M. the King of the Belgiums, hm—hm—hm! One dozen McCorquodale's celebrated Pure Cairn Magorrachan Mountain Dew, one dozen ditto, one dozen ditto! My dear Miss Lossie, you're right all along the line. Be out some one else has been having a swig! Little Clementina,' to the maid who was laying the cloth for lunch, 'how much Pure Cairn Magorrachan Mountain Dew have you had out of these here bottles since we had them by the dozen?'

"'Law, Master!' said little Clementina.

"'What a shame!' said I. 'Never mind Mr. Vance, Seraphina.'

"'Law, Miss,' replied Seraphina, rightly so called by me. 'Fancy mindin' Master!' And retired undisturbed. Master resumed—

"'Yes—you're right, Miss Lossie. I'd no idea I'd worked through such a show of liquor.' He put the account back with a sigh, and then went on, speaking with his back to me as he stood at the desk. 'When my dear wife was alive it was she that stood between me and the 'Abit. But I was off and on, off and on. Till I got that bad lay-up—it might have been three months before I did that job at your Governor's. Did Joe ever tell you of my fight with a Sweep?'

"'No—not a word.'

"'Good boy! He thought it best for his daddy to keep his mouth shut. Well, I got laid up two months and couldn't move. And my Nellie she stopped off all intoxicants, and when I got round I didn't want 'em somehow. And she said next time I got concerned in liquor, she'd cut her throat straight off. So I knocked it all off, and my luck began——'

"I had a sort of feeling that I had said all I needed to say, and that rubbing it in might be a mistake. The mere fact that I had come to see him after the receipt of Joe's letter, and told him its contents, seemed to me to carry full weight, and that lecturing and amplification could add nothing and might even do harm. So I said nothing, and Mr. Vance continued still standing at the desk and looking through the vermilion glass at the Workshops.

"'And luck it has been—job follerin' job. Haven't stood a day idle since that day five year agone when I set my man to peck up your front garden with a peck and a shovel I had to borrow off a friend, and a barrer 'ired on credit. He's foreman now on a contract job down by Cherry Garden pier—payin' hundred and fifteen and sixpence a week in wages, barring ove time, and if he don't complete by December the first, a fine o fifty pounds per diem for every day overdue. But it ain't o much use, that I can see, all of it!'

"'I hope he *will* complete, Mr. Vance,' said I, appalled by th magnitude of these figures.

"'Trust William,' said Mr. Vance. I remembered Willian 'We shall never have to pay a brass farden in fines—no we!'

"'How on earth have you managed to do it, Mr. Vance?' H turned round from the window to reply. 'By never doing a hand' turn myself, Miss Lossie,' said he. 'If I was to, I should spil all. If I was to add up a column of figures, I should add 'em u wrong. If I was to mix a yard o' concrete, I should mix it wrong If I was only to try to tenant up a window frame, I should tenan it up wrong. So I just set a couple o' young men on to addin up, and if either catches the other out it's a shillin' off o' one' salary on to the other. Sim'lar all through!

"'Never you do anything yourself, Miss Lossie. That's wher the mistake comes in. Why, when I was putting down my machinery, four year ago, do you suppose I ever so much as looke at it? Not I! I says to the Engineer—chap from Manchester— "My friend," says I, "if you want to attend to this little jol what you've got to bear in mind is this—I want to employ rathe more than two hundred hands in this here yard, and *you* can fin out a sight better than I can how much power each o' them 'll wan off the engine. All I say is, don't ask me! You can see my foreman of jiners, and ask him how much *he* wants. And the hea Smith, you can see him and find what 'll satisfy him. But don bother me about whether the Boiler is to be Cornish or Lancashire nor yet about condensing engines nor high pressures nor lo pressures. Just you make a drawing and a contract and say wha sort o' security you can give me for having all complete by Christmas, and I shall send you on without openin' you, to my Consultin' Engineer in George Street, Westminster, and he'll squar up with you." Now if I'd gone interferin' betwixt him and m foreman, a nice how-do-you-do there'd 'a' been!'

"'But, Mr. Vance, had you a Consulting Engineer in Grea George Street, Westminster?'

"'O' coorse I had, Miss Lossie. I'd never consulted him, an never have, but he'd have been my Consulting Engineer by the tim I'd consulted him, and I'd no need for him until I'd done s

Anyhow, the end was I got as good a jiner's shop as any in London. It's well known how many fingers are taken off by band-saws in ten years, accordin' to the number of horses-power transmitted, in any first-class shop, and though I can't remember the figures, I know we're well below the average. In some shops you'll find a loose finger in the saw-dust as often as not, when swep' up.'

"I heard Clementina's breath taken away by this awful revelation, and thinking it would be kind to utilize my incredulous expression to reassure her, I turned round, and saw that she was laying a place for me. So I judged it time to go. Mr. Vance accompanied me to the front gate.

"'What we was talkin' about,' said he, touching my hand slightly with his forefinger—and his voice lost the sort of good-humoured nasal twang it always had when he was talking at random, and became serious, 'Don't you fret about it, Miss Lossie, and don't you let the Nipper fret. I'll take good care—*I* know where to stop. It 'll be all right.'

"I felt this attitude was a certain preliminary to its being all wrong, and that I ought to tell him his only chance would be in total abstinence, for a time at any rate. I was irresolute for a moment. Then all in an instant, Heaven only knows why, there shot into my mind a conversation I had had with Mrs. Vance years before. I had completely forgotten it. She had used to me the very expression then that her husband had just used. Her words were—'My dear Miss Lossie, if all the men that know where to stop, stopped, it would be all right. But they know and they don't do it.'

"I repeated this word for word to Mr. Vance, adding, 'Do you know who said that to me, one day at your old cottage gate, years and years ago? It seems to me as if I could see and hear her now—almost as if I had just left her and she had told me to tell you—almost as if it had been yesterday—in the next street. Just think! If it had.'

"'Ah, if!' said he, dreamily, and then added 'Good-bye, Miss Lossie. God bless you, my dear! It shall be all right.'

"I had gone a few paces when I heard him call me back. 'Half a minute, Miss Lossie,' said he. 'Would you mind stepping back into the house, just for one half-a-minute?'

"I did so. A new-drawn whiskey-bottle stood on the table, just placed there by the young gal. He took it up, took out the cork, and deliberately poured it on the fire, sending a splendid blue blaze up the chimney. Clementina, coming in with the gist, or substance of the luncheon, was stricken too dumb to say well she never, but stood meaning it and forgetting to put down her tray in the excitement and rejoicing incident to fireworks.

"'It's no use smashing the bottle,' said Mr. Vance, turning to me as the last flicker died down. 'Because there's a penny on the bottle. But you see, Miss Lossie, it 'll be all right now.'

"I went home happy. I felt as if I had carried him a mesage from the beyond. Papa says he believes he'll be all right, for a good while at any rate. . . ."

The letter ends with apologies for its great length, and a few particulars of family matters.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TALE OF JOE'S PUGNACITY AT SCHOOL. OF HIS FATHER'S ABSTINENCE. MUCH ABOUT HIS NAMESAKE JOEY, WHICH WE WOULD OMIT IF WE COULD DO WITHOUT IT. OF THE RAPIDITY OF HIS FATHER'S RISE. OF HOW HE SAW NOLLY, BUT THE OTHER DAY, AND COULD NOT SPEAK WITH HIM. OF HOW LOSSIE IS STILL LIVING, IN ITALY.

Probably it falls to the lot of very few people to have such an opportunity of finding out how much they have forgotten as this old packet of letters has given me.

This last one brought back to my mind the fact that my Father, shortly after completing his Works on the piece of land in the rear of our house, had acquired also about an acre between it and the railway, thereby becoming possessor of an ideal place for the accumulation of bricks and timber. I had completely forgotten this. It brought back also the way in which Mr. Capstick's letter arrived at the school. The lodge where the Postman delivered the letters was just within hearing of the room where I, with others, was profitably employed in the making of bad Latin verses, and I caught my name in the colloquy between that Official and the Gate-Porter. There was a letter directed to me, Mr. J. Vance, Junr., and the sorters had kept the letter outside the parcel which was handed in in a lump for later distribution, as all my letters had hitherto been to Master Joseph (or Master Joe) Vance. This disquieted me, and I was constrained to plead my distraction as an excuse for an hexameter without a cæsura—which, as all the classical world knows, is a thing it would have been soundly flogged for when it was a boy. I recollected the fact of having had a letter from Mr. Capstick, and of my writing to Lossie, but it had all grown dim (in more than forty years of oblivion) and the letter brought it all back again. It also identified itself to me as the cause of a thrilling incident, which was not without its influence on my after life. For a contemptuous word about her from a boy bigger than myself exasperated me as I read it, and led to his receiving as savage a thrashing as a boy of my years could give, in a fight lasting over thirty minutes by my second's watch, which fight would, I suspect, still be found among th school traditions. If ever you meet an old St. Withold's boy, ask him if he ever heard of the great fight between little Vance and Bony Macallister. I am afraid I was rather pugnacious— probably inherited it from my Father, who had indeed been mos successful in his encounters until he came across that fatal Sweep Poor Bony Macallister, I may remark, had merely looked over my shoulder and observed that that wasn't my Fancy Gurl's hand writing, which it wasn't. I think now that I was unjust and precipitate to go for him as I did then and there. We were separated, and the fight put on a proper footing. We naturally became great friends after, *more puerorum.* But I must not allow him to lead me altogether away from what I was saying.

I gather, then, from this letter, and from what I can remembe of concurrent incident, that had it not been for Lossie's courage ous dash at the position, my anxieties about my Father at tha time might still have continued. As it was, when I returned a the end of '55 for the Christmas holiday, and he and I eat our Christmas dinner at Poplar Villa by invitation, he took almos nothing to drink, and what little he did take was only in honour of the occasion. He was pleased to represent himself as the vic tim of Lossie's tyranny (she perfectly understanding his humour and accepting it, as rather facilitating the position than other wise), saying down the length of the table, in the indescribable nasal way which seemed too lazy to articulate—"Don't you pu any brandy over *my* corner of the puddin', Miss Lossie; or after two sherry and sodas and 'arf-a-glass o' port I shall be rollin about under the table." To which she replied, "It's too late now Mr. Vance! You should have spoken before. You'll have to find out how to leave the brandy and eat the pudding for yourself Or you needn't totally abstain from it if somebody else does, you know. Ask Aunty to, or you can totally abstain from hers, for that matter. That will make it square!" And the reference to Aunty was rash, as it attracted her attention, and the difficulty of explaining the idea of making good an indulgence in one glass of spirits, by totally abstaining from another, may be imagined when it had to be instilled into an unreceptive mind through a deaf ear.

And I had quite forgotten all that too till after I had read the letter! And now I can shut my smarting eyes in the London fog and almost hear again Lossie's attempts to shout the explanation nearly crying with laughter all the while at the perfect hopelessness of it. Did the man who rolled down the Matterhorn really recollect *every* incident in his life before he reached the bottom, as he said he did?

Had I to write from memory alone an account of my Father's relations with the bottle at this date, it would have run somewhat thus—"He was rather less sober as a widower than before my Mother's death; but his interest in his business, and I think the influence of Dr. Thorpe and his daughter Lucilla, kept him from excesses." Perhaps no more than this is absolutely necessary to my story. It is difficult to draw a line when one is without artistic ability, which I have been frequently assured is the case with me. The shortest biography I ever saw was the word *Vixit* alone on a tombstone—perhaps the proportion of the detail of Lossie's letter to the importance of its contents runs too much into the opposite extreme.

I wish these letters supplied one or two things which I have so far been unable to find. Of course they may turn up later, as I go on with my opening and perusal of the packets; but though I have expected them I have been disappointed hitherto.

For instance, some clue to the changes which converted my namesake Joey from a comically voluble, but very lovable, baby to a rather pert and selfish, but by no means lovable, boy. For I have to record this transformation with a misgiving that a real author, skilful in making use of intractable materials, would soften it down somewhat, to accommodate it to his reader's powers of deglutition. I cannot do this sort of thing. But I should be glad of a lift—and am living in hope that something will turn up.

For there is nothing stranger in Nature than the development of odiousness. What an entirely delightful person was * * * * * when he was eight months old, in all the bloom of his creases, furnished with a matchless nape to his neck in which his appreciators might burrow; his premature baldness beginning to show a light down of premature hair; his premature arms that wouldn't bend at the joints, being held by two firm but tender crease-flanks; and that always did precisely the same thing suddenly; his delightful practice of stopping abruptly at the end of the first syllable of a speech. What an entirely satisfactory and adequate little human creature as far as it went! And look at it now that it has gone forty years farther. I ask you, at the risk of outrage to your feelings and Mrs. Grundy's, to say what you would do if * * * * * were fetched down *now* in his nightgown to be shown? Well! both times it would be himself and none other! And just think, when he gets on his legs (for he is in Parliament), how pleased the other grown-up infants would be if he stopped suddenly short at the first syllable of his speech, and let them off the rest.

However (as you will say probably), this is only the inevitable change incident to all humanity. So it is, but what I want to get to is that my namesake changed even more than this, though this is strange enough. I don't wish to suggest that * * * * *, who is a most respectable man, and well known in public life, is one scrap more repulsive and detestable as compared with his early half than you or me. I was philosophizing, and now I'm ashamed, and beg pardon. Let me get back to Joey Thorpe.

Joey then changed *more* than was reasonable. It may be said that in this respect of selfishness that he didn't change, but remained a baby,—only self-seeking is charming in a baby, while altruism, if it takes the form of requiring you to suck what it has already sucked, is as unpleasant as benevolence that won't let you choose your own benefits, but drubs and thwacks them into you and is shocked if you are not truly thankful, Amen! On the other hand, a boy in his teens is not nice enough *per se* to carry off much more self-seeking than is his privilege as a man; nor is he ever so odious but he may make himself still more so by always taking and never giving. Self-help is a glorious thing, and one of our numerous birthrights, but it should stop short of helping oneself to all the gravy in the dish.

I hope all this constitutes a broad enough hint of the sort of thing that disconcerted me in Joey as he changed from boy to man. It is very irritating in Human Nature to go and behave so, especially when you necessarily must and do love the creature in which the change is wrought. For how could I be off loving Joseph Thorpe, when I could still see in his rather hard and cold eyes the slightly projecting orbs of the dear little midget that so nearly got stuck to his sister the first time I saw him, by kissing her too tight? and could hear in his easy and melodious speech the articulation of the baby who kept us all amused with his prompt appropriation and perversion of every new phrase that reached his little pink ears? Everybody spoiled Joey in those days, myself as much as any one. There are some children whom it seems natural to spoil, and a general agreement to that end is epidemic—so much so that an isolated stand against it only makes its originator unpopular. Such a stand from a sense of duty appears like a condemnation of the rest of the world; and is apt to be imputed to personal dislike. This was impossible in Joey's case—at least, while he was still a baby. He was lovable *per se,* until he began showing what he meant to be like later. Besides he was Lossie's other Joey, so of course he was ineligible for my hatred. He was irritating all the same, especially when he was selfish and ungrateful to his sister, who spoiled him nearly as much as we did. "But she shouldn't have spoiled him at all," I hear you say? Very well, then! She shouldn't. I make you a free present of the admission, but it can't be altered now. It's too late.

Clearly, in these early days, I wasn't in love with Lossie. Ask any one who knows the Tender Passion—he or she will at once say I *couldn't* have been in love with her, or I should have been jealous of my young namesake and hated him. I didn't *then* certainly, and changes of feeling during manhood were certainly not connected with jealousy. This I hope to explain later, if I live to complete this narrative. As for what the nature of my devotion to Lossie was, I am inclined to think that it resembled the rich gold mine Brer Rabbit made for himself. It was an invention of my own; and I still think, in spite of everything that has happened, that of all my many inventions it is the one that has paid best.

Very likely other things in this narrative may be made by me to seem improbable, for want of skill in the telling. And yet, there they were!

For instance, I find at the first introduction of my Father to the Thorpe family, that he appears in the character (socially speaking) of a Man. That is to say, he belongs to the class that is spoken to in the passage; that never brings its tools and has to go away for them; that abounds on planks and ladders overhead, and calls out "*Be-low*" to the earthbound passer-by; that is sure to be out of the house by Saturday and never is. And now I am writing of him only some six years later as the invited guest to Dr. Thorpe's table on Christmas Day! I know it seems improbable, but it is not that the succession of events is improbable; only that they happened within a very short time. Let us imagine the same succession of events in double the time. Figure to yourself that a Man (as per description) whom you were first conscious of in corduroy, with a flavour, reappears in twelve months in a suit of tweed and a hat which, though a billycock in proportion, has a stiff brim and no pocket-handkerchief in it. Do you not feel it quite natural that two years later, when he calls to submit an estimate, he should do so in a neat gig, which stands at the door and is said a "*Who-ah*" to, while you confer with him about his wish to spare you expense? And three years later, when you have wondered whether it would be worth his while now to undertake your new little job (three times as big as the other little job), and you have timidly suggested it, does it not seem consecutive that he should drive up to your door in a bang-up turn-out and pair, attired in broadcloth and yellow kid gloves, and a sacred stovepipe hat to crown all? Of course it does, and so much so that you will probably ask him if he won't sit down and take some lunch with you and yours. If he doesn't this time, he will next. It is simply a question of time and a sense of cheque-books.

I think if you infuse into this train of imaginary incidents an analogy of my own exceptional relations with the Thorpe family and take my word for the authenticity of the letters, you won't feel so very incredulous about my Father's sudden exaltation.

Not more, perhaps, than I do at this moment. For, seeing no chance of deciphering more of the letters in this hideous darkness, I have put them away with my manuscript, and have now nothing to bring back to me a single memory of those days. Even the jargon of my attendant, which I feel ought by rights to resemble that of Mrs. Packles or Feener, is as unlike as it can well be. When I ask her what was that row last night, in the street behind, just on to midnight, she replies that it was a *lidy* with a *biby*, fighting with another *lidy*, and both were took off to the *stytion*. Nobody had that accent in my boyhood. Even the pothouse from which the two ladies had to be removed is completely changed. In the fifties I know exactly what it was like—flaring gas-jets—huge plate-glass windows blocked with giant numerals printed on paper to show how cheaply the filthy fluids on sale would harden the livers and soften the brains of their consumers—a compo front painted with four coats of stone-colour, two flat and two round, every three years—all woodwork ditto in Brunswick Brown—not because it was the George the Fourth, but because that brown was a good out-o'-door colour—and a flamboyant Lion and Unicorn fighting for a crown much too big for either of them on the corner of the first-floor.—It is still the George the Fourth, but the gas-jets no longer sow wild oats of lamp-black—they are *rangés*. A wedding of Heat and Light has an offspring of Incandescence, and all is steady and demure. The announcements on the windows are glass letters, scorning the ephemeral, and recording serene facts superior to change. The compo front has gone and is now rebuilt with red-rubbers and terra-cotta facings, and as for the woodwork it is quite beautiful with Art-colours, and the entrance to the private bar is lined with Art-tiles covered with Art-lustres. But the owner still imports his own Brandy, and all the other filth is what it was in the other filth-house. Now, as then, there is nothing to eat, except it be sausages and mashed potatoes. Now, as then, there may be seen on Saturday nights an oppressed African singing, through a swing-door on the jar, of the joys of South Carolina; for George the Fourth is not licensed for music, and he has to palter idly with the sacred truth, and pretend he doesn't notice. And when he rewards the musician's efforts, he pretends it isn't a banjo into which he drops his coins, but some inexplicable resonant ladle, thrust in from pure greed, by a passing negro.

I noted these particulars this morning before the fog became too thick while I was taking my morning walk. And the young woman who is now bringing in my chop was doing the steps, and her apron strap coming off she borrowed a pin of me, and while she pinned herself up for further kneeling, she told me about the two ladies, and I stood talking to her, and thought her hand and arm like Vi Thorpe's, only for the rough work and soap and water spoiling it. No! Now that the letters are back on their shelf in the chiffonier under the book-case, and Betsy Austin, the young lady above mentioned, is bringing me in a probably underdone chop and potatoes in their skins with buttons on them in recesses like armchair cushions,—(for am I not in England?)—there really is absolutely nothing in the room to bring back that remote time. And I am sadly in want of landmarks during the latter period of my schooldays. It is rather like a voyage on a calm sea out of sight of land. St. Withold, I suppose, was too busy with the new boys to make my life very detestable to me, or perhaps my inveterate studiousness procured immunities. I was expected to do the school credit, and had peace. In my holiday times I gave a good deal of instruction to Joey Thorpe, and found him a good pupil—in fact, a clever one. I had no fault with him on that score. He developed a taste for literature; and had a marked faculty for clever flippant writing, prose and verse, which led to his becoming very vain. It was singular that a boy who had had so very little schooling should have matured so early.

I mean by this that his intelligence matured, and he read continually, and remembered what he read. But this did not seem to interfere with his remaining (the phrase was Lossie's) as great a baby as ever. If he did not get what he wanted, he would become very irritable, and almost cry with vexation. I suppose it was this seeming childishness that made us hope he did not fully understand his own literary propensities. I am sure Lossie for one did not believe that he understood half the expressions he made use of in the verse he wrote (even at fifteen or sixteen). I recollect his father saying to me once, "I wish Joey wouldn't be so Anglo-

Saxon," and I remarked I supposed it was the modern tendency in poetry to discard Latin derivatives, and that Tennyson had set the example.

"I don't mean that," said the Doctor. "I'm referring to a practice our Anglo-Saxon ancestors had of always calling spades spades, and rarely talking about anything else. Poor Loss said to me yesterday after he read us his last new verses that it was embarrassingly Scriptural, but of course the darling child hardly understood what he had written, so it would be a pity to say anything to him about it and make him think. 'Oh, don't you know, Papa,' says she, 'when it's reading the Bible, and you don't know which way to look!' If it wasn't for Lossie I should read Master Joey a lecture—but she seems so very sure that he doesn't realize the meaning of a lot of what he writes, and only uses expressions that have acquired a standard picturesqueness, and are now known to be right in Poetry, that I really feel I might put my foot in it. Suppose he were to turn on me and ask me what that very Elizabethan expression he used—you remember?—really meant! I should feel bound to explain, and I'm not sure I shouldn't do best to leave it alone. I keep on hoping for the development, in Joey, of the faculty of Good Taste, as we old fogies used to call it. It's a quality of the inner soul, that gives a bias to the intellect. So long as it remains dormant, I am bound to say I object to Poets. Of course I don't object to Joey altogether, but I object to his faculties growing at such a rate while he himself remains stationary."

It was this remark of Dr. Thorpe that first suggested to me his view that we afterwards conversed so much about; that when we talk of the Soul, we mean the Self, and that it would be a far more logical way to talk of a Soul's Man than of a Man's Soul. If so, we ought to speak sometimes thus—"That splendid soul has a little snub-nosed, squinting—hunchback," instead of "That little, etc., has a splendid soul." Or *vice versa:*—"That loathsome spiritual mass of pestilent meanness and depravity has a remarkably handsome man," instead of "That remarkably handsome man's soul is, etc., etc." But I am slipping away from Joey Thorpe. Perhaps in what I have written I have scarcely done justice to his abilities. I ought to note that even before he went to the University he had already achieved a certain amount of publication, and was predicted great things of by a small circle of admirers. His father could not help being proud of the boy's cleverness, superficial and flippant as both he and I thought it. His brother Nolly had not shown any very marked tastes, except for Athletics, and as long as he could make record jumps and row in eights and bat in elevens, he asked nothing better. He accepted his destiny tranquilly, and went into the Law because the way was paved for him. He would gladly have stopped out of the Law and everything else if left to himself and the cultivation of his biceps. But the Law, in the shape of Aldridge, Spencer, Spencer & Aldridge's office, gaped for him and a monetary accompaniment, and at the end of a few years he was able to reserve his opinion almost as well as Mr. Spencer himself. It is very funny to think of him now. For though I have not seen him for twenty years, I hear things; and among others I have heard that Mr. Oliver Thorpe—(Spencer, Aldridge, Thorpe & Flowerdew)—has a residence in Surrey called The Magnolias, and that he comes still to Charing Cross Station, every other day, and has a cab to his clerk's-nest in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and always gives eighteenpence, or even two shillings if he hasn't a sixpence, to the cabman—who, to tell you the truth, was my informant on all these points. He was an observant man, who was just going to take back to its owner a card-case he had found in his cab, which at first he had thought was mine—an incident which had led to conversation, and to a joint inspection of the contents of the card-case, actually Nolly Thorpe's! I suspect that cabman retailed to him his interview with (very probably) an Old Cock who looked surprised.—Nolly would have looked so too, had he known what Old Cock.

It is strange to think of! But it is stranger still to me to think as I sit here and choke in the fog, and decline Betsy Austin's proposal to bring lights, because then she may see tears in my face that are not due to fog alone, but to a thought of the joy it would have been to me to see dear old Nolly's face again, and hold his hand—it is stranger still to think that even now, at this very moment, there is living in a Villa at the foot of Fiesole Hill—about five minutes' walk along the road that goes *a destra* just before you get to the big church at San Domenico—an old English lady who went to live there twenty years ago, and who was Lossie.—I know all about the place although I shall never see her again, nor she me. But as I look at the white wafer behind the curling fog-reek that I know is the sun in the country, I think of the *sole di marzo* blazing on the roses in that Tuscan heat-trap; of the rifted trunks and dark leaves and light leaves of the olives; of the mighty deliberation of the great white oxen that no man can make to go quicker or stop; of the scraps of song that all end in one cadence, and make one feel how very much one really is in Tuscany. And then I wonder if this old English lady ever thinks of me.

Looked at from the point of view of common sense (whatever that means) it is clearly better that she should not. What has she to gain by it? Nothing but pain and discomfort. For one thing I have made up my mind to—that she shall never know the truth. Much better for her to forget my existence altogether. Probably she does, for when you come to think of it, what a long long time it is!

CHAPTER XIX

HOW DR. THORPE VISITED JOE AT OXFORD, AND HOW THAT VISIT ENDED THE FIRST MOVEMENT OF JOE'S LIFE ON A DISCORD. OF HIS PAINFUL DOUBLE IDENTITY.

In the autumn of 1860 I was a young man reading at Oxford, whose friends were kind enough to expect him to do great things. He felt the burden of his responsibilities severely, and that he was bound, under penalties, to triumph in a contest in which an untimely attack of summer-complaint might render useless the scholarship of Erasmus and the mathematics of Newton and Leibnitz combined.

I do not mean that my friends were exceptionally ill-judging; indeed, I think they did their best. But they were bad actors. Perhaps as safe a line to go on as any was the one adopted by my Father. "You'll bring me 'ome your wooden spoon, Joe, when you've got it," he used to say. For he was not very clear about the curricula of Oxford and Cambridge, and confused the one with the other. This was better than expressing overweening confidence with a slightest possible sense of gasp in the background. But better even than this would have been the attitude of Porky Owls, who would have expressed doubts of the ability of the University to examine, and certainty of my inability to pass creditably, in the same breath. He would have enquired who the Senate was, ridin' the igh 'orse and givin' themselves airs; disparaged reading as a means of acquiring information, and probably condemned knowledge itself as a useless and artificial luxury of stuck-uppers. He lived in a bracing atmosphere and rejoiced in its entire freedom from Rot.

I suppose it was the Boats, on one morning of this particular autumn of 1860, that made me think of Porky, in his capacity of British Seaman, as I took some early sculling exercise to qualify me for a good day of undisturbed reading. I sculled upstream as far as Godstowe lock, and wondered what Porky looked like now, with open collar-bones and a richly bronzed skin, perhaps rowing at this moment in quite another style, forcing some huge yawl a few inches at a time against a head wind and tide, every movement seeming more loss than gain, till the mere landsman decides in his land-mind that they never can and never will make some point they are striving for. And decides all wrong of course, because shortly for some mysterious reason only perceived by a sea-mind, behold the end attained and the boat gliding easily along in oily waters, and never a thole-pin broken under the mighty strain!

How easily *I* went slipping up the stream! It was a glorious cloudless morning at the end of August, and thinking of the tough work of the imaginary boat I had placed Porky in made my own slight work seem slighter. And just below the lock, as I allowed him and his crew to get into smoother water, there came up behind me the musical rhythm of eight oars going downstream apace, whereof the stroke called out to me firstly was that Vance of Balliol?—which it was, and secondly that Dr. Thorpe was up, having come by the late train last night, and something more quite inaudible. For strokes of eights pass quickly out of hearing, and even at the best, when working hard, are not in good shouting form. So I had to be content with that much information, that Dr. Thorpe was in Oxford, and had come unexpectedly by the late train last night. And what became of the imaginary crew of Porky Owls's boat I do not know, for my mind set out at once to seek for a reason why the Doctor should come quite suddenly to Oxford in this abnormal way, without so much as a word of warning. It was certainly odd! I turned down the stream, and pretended I wasn't a little uneasy.

I don't believe any one has had so happy a life but what there have been in it well-marked moments at which he would not sooner have stopped abruptly than go on. Had I my life to live again I would soonest, being free to choose, go no further than the moment when I arrived, a new boy, at the school at Helstaple. If I could not avoid that new experience, and were obliged to go through with it, and then face my Mother's death, I would put up an express petition to Destiny that I might get no further than the moment when I was happily dreaming, in the shade of the alders and willows, on the difference between sea and river rowing, and wondering what had become of my old friend Porky Owls. This is why I have been at some pains to describe that moment, which otherwise has no bearing whatever on my story.

Mr. Bossum's man at the boathouse remarked that I hadn't been long agone this morning, which was true. I held to my pretence that I was not anxious, to the extent of walking slower than I wanted to at first, but I forgot to keep it up, before I had got halfway through Jericho, and broke into a brisk walk. I was glad when I saw the Doctor, close by the Martyr's Memorial, in the shade for the sun was hot, evidently waiting for me. Before I saw his face clearly, I saw it had an anxiety on it. But oh no!—nothing was the matter! I took his word for it, and pretended I was satisfied. But we were not quite like our two selves when all things were at their rightest.

"Oh no!" said he again. "Nothing's the matter. I came over to look at a cranium. I'm writing a paper on the Missing Link—and I couldn't feel satisfied unless I saw this skull myself. It's only a few hours, after all! Besides, I always like a visit to Oxford. Only I wish to goodness they would leave the Colleges alone—they'll soon all be as clean and smooth as creamlaid note. Why shouldn't they peel if they like? They aren't infectious when they peel, like scarlet-fever patients—why not let two inches of stone come off a three-foot thick wall?"

"Isn't there some notion that the front surface coming off lets the water in? How's Lossie?"

"Lossie's very well.—If they think that, I can tell them as a geologist, that they are what your Father would call etcetera fools—we understand, eh, Joe? Because the absorbent stone comes away and leaves the hard non-absorbent. That's why they have been *in statu quo* such a long time. Don't you see, Joe? It isn't as if the decay could go on, on, on, through the block——"

I saw and acquiesced. But keenly as I should have discussed the subject another time, I felt it could wait, and indeed suspected it was being made the most of for some strategic purpose; and this wasn't like the Doctor. I felt that he had not been quite natural when I asked after Lossie. "Very well" was very well as far as it went—but it ought to have been much more. I asked how were Vi and Nolly and Joe? And, for that matter, Aunt Izzy?

"Deafer than ever!" said Dr. Thorpe. "Of course one doesn't wonder when she hears a dog is a Dalmatian, and thinks the speaker is swearing. Nor when Vi says she has been shopping and she says, 'But who was it *said* so, dear? I'm sure *I* never thought you shocking——' In these cases the missing link is obvious! But when it comes to her being shouted to that Canon Pennefather is in the drawing-room, and she goes downstairs and deliberately enquires after Mrs. Cox, it gets impossible—how on earth Mrs. Cox crept in we never could make out!"

"How's Vi going on with the Bart?"

"Oh—ah!—the Bart—yes, that's the one she has on at present.

She *may* become Lady Towerstairs, or she may not! I never speculate now about Vi."

He became distrait for a moment, then said, "She's six-and-twenty, you know—going for seven-and-twenty." And I thought he was going to say something about Lossie, but he became absent and thoughtful again. We had arrived at my rooms, and the navigation of a rather dark stairway supplied a satisfactory reason for silence.

The Doctor had not breakfasted, but did not seem to take very cordially to doing so. He became much interested in the backs of my books.

"Regiomontanus, Nicholas of Cusa, Tredgold on the Steam-engine! That's a sudden jump, Joe!—What do want with Tredgold on the Steam Engine? He's more in the line of that poor gobblestick—what's his name—Thistlethwayte." This was an enthusiast who had invented a perpetual motion, and wanted the Doctor to get the Royal Society to grant him two thousand pounds to construct a wheel which was to rotate forever on its axis in a vacuum. The Doctor continued: "Do you know, that poor chap is still at it! He came to me only a few days ago, with his machine rotating on its axis in his poor vacuum of a brain, and I was obliged to lend him a few shillings to keep him from starvation. Don't you go doing the same, Joe. Leave the inventions alone. They're the Deuce's own delight! Once you begin, it's like dram-drinking or Monte Carlo——"

The effect of the introduction of vital interests was wholesome and I was glad of the new departure, although I had to confess up in respect of irregularities in reading. "Anyhow, Doctor," said I, "you'll admit that if poor Thistlethwayte had begun by reading Tredgold as carefully as I've done, he wouldn't have invented the Universal Lubricant."

"Well—he might have invented his Universal Lubricant without reading Tredgold, and yet known that he couldn't abolish friction. His Lubricant is very greasy, no doubt, but he has no notion how little friction it takes to stop a wheel in a billion of years——"

"Hasn't his Lubricant a commercial value?—I mean without considering the Perpetual Motion idea?"

"I have no doubt it has. But he won't patent it, because that involves publication, and wicked capitalists will cut in and use it for Perpetual Motions before he can, and take the bread out of his mouth and his children's—nine children he has, Joe, and another coming!"

I hoped the anxiety on the Doctor's face was, after all, about this chap. Only it seemed so out of proportion. However, he was clearly an element of disquiet.

"I've done the best I can," continued Dr. Thorpe; "I've told him that if a leaden peg-top as big as the sun started *in vacuo* at a billion revolutions per second——"

"It would want a very carefully tempered steel peg, and a good hard piece of ground to stand on," said I.

"Well—yes—it would! Anyhow, I told Mr. Thistlethwayte it must slow down in the course of a few billions of billions of years, because even if he lived to keep the peg lubricated there would be some friction."

"What did he say?"

"That he had ventured to hope I should talk seriously! And he seemed so hurt, that I offered to pay his Patent fees if he would publish. But he declined. I think he suspected me of wanting to take advantage of him! So just you be warned by him, Joe, and don't be an Inventor——"

"It's only a Spherical Engine with a new reciprocating movement, and I'm not going to think about it seriously till I've passed. How's Joey?"

"Oh—Joey's very well—very well!" And I was sorry that in my anxiety to leave the subject of my inventive propensity—about which, in truth, I felt very guilty—I had chanced back to a renewal of Dr. Thorpe's anxious aspect, which I had hoped was going to vanish. He became again thoughtful, hesitating, depressed—seemed to be going to speak, and said nothing. At last he pulled himself together in a sort of recapitulative way, as one who reports progress and declares his next step in advance, and said well now it was time for him to be off! He would go to see the cranium, and there were one or two people he wanted to speak to, and he would be back about lunch-time. Even then he did not go without a recurrence of the hesitating manner, but it came to nothing and he started off to look at the cranium. I watched him along the street and saw him stop once or twice, and stand rubbing his chin thoughtfully. I went back to Pindar, who was the classic I was engaged in assimilating at that time. But I was puzzled and uneasy, and Pindar disagreed with me—especially when I reflected that the Doctor had hardly said a word about Lossie in all our conversation, of which of course the above only contains the salient points.

He came back as he had said, and after eating very little lunch, walked out with me in the grounds. I cannot remember exactly how it came in, but he used the expression "this new engagement," and I, understanding that he was speaking about Vi's last, made some absent-minded comment, asked about the Towerstairs family, or something of that sort—I really forget what.

"My dear boy," said he. "You don't understand. I was not speaking about Vi's engagement—I was speaking of Lossie's."

Sometimes the mind opposes automatically the receipt of fatal news, from some anticipative instinct, without its owner at all knowing why it rejects it. I found myself quite unable to attach any meaning to the Doctor's words.

"I was speaking of Lossie's engagement—she has got herself engaged to be married."

"Is Lossie engaged to be married?" I heard myself speaking quite calmly to the Doctor. He put his arm in mine—

"I was not sure she had not written to tell you," said he, half interrogatively. But I felt that he was saying something to gain a minute, or to gain a foothold, or to find something on which to hinge what we should say next. I did not look at him, but I knew that his eyes—so like Lossie's!—turned round to me at intervals; and we walked on, the truth of the position working slowly into my mind. Concurrently, I became aware that he did see, and had seen, more clearly than I even now began to see, the bearing of the news he had to tell on my own life and its future. I should have been well pleased to be able to say to him in the interval of comparative calm in which I awaited the full truth, which I knew was coming, how I loved his kind heart for its love and fears for me. Both of which, strange to say, I felt to know much better than their agitating cause. But I said nothing, and we walked on in silence.

Some tacit compact between us made the silence a long one, but in the end it was I who spoke—I was not in love with the sound of my own voice when it came.

"If Lossie has given her word she will keep it. But I have had no letter yet.—What is his name? I mean what is the name of the——"

"Man? It is General Desprez. He is a very distinguished soldier—you know the name?"

"Of course."

"She went to stay for a week at the Vandeleurs'. He was there, and at the end of the week he made her an offer and she accepted him.—I know! It *was* very sudden——"

"Yes—that is what I was going to say."

"Very sudden, indeed. But with Lossie, very sudden means very serious.—She isn't Vi——"

"You have seen him?"

"He came up with her from the Vandeleurs' on Saturday and they came direct to me. Of course formally, with his rigid ideas of duty, his position was that he had asked Lossie's leave to speak to me—people go through these farces, but they are all gammon!"

He stopped to take snuff—then put his arm again in mine.

"Yes," he went on, "they are all gammon. Of course the whole thing was settled past any possible unsettling. Two more undemonstrative lovers I never saw, in public, but nevertheless no one could be five minutes in the room with them and not see all about it——" I had interjected a direct enquiry whether Dr. Thorpe liked him, and he finished his sentence and then replied, "I have no fault to find with him, and I know I shall like him in time, but—Good-morning!"

He stopped short, and we got through a brief interview with a casual sub-librarian, who I am sure never suspected that anything was going wrong with either of us. Then he continued: "Yes—Joe—I know I shall like him in time. But Lossie is Lossie."

Yes—that was what was wrong. Lossie was Lossie—

"I suppose Fathers are naturally a selfish class, but it can't be helped! Anthropoid Apes are selfish, I believe, and no doubt Fathers are descended from them. I shan't find it at all easy to reconcile myself to Lossie going away to India, as she no doubt will."

I had not realized this contingency, but it seemed to make no difference in the calamity; at least in my share of it.—The thing was too new, and I was too stunned to discern in this indifference any light thrown on the nature of my affection for Lossie. I see it now.

"You can fancy, my dear boy," continued the Doctor, "how embarrassingly mixed any Father's feelings must be over a thing like this. Even if I could have been inclined to quarrel with a man Lossie loved, which is absurd, how could I find any fault with this one? A splendid soldier, a cultivated man, writer, traveller, what not? There was not even the vernacular ground of difficulty-mongering of the marriage-blocker, the money consideration; for he is next heir to Stoat's-Leaze in Derbyshire and the present owner is eighty-two and in a madhouse—or something of the sort. Of course I know I ought to be rejoicing over the splendid match. But, Lossie going away to India! It's no use, Joe, Fathers cannot help being Fathers——"

"Nor brothers brothers," said I. And then some question stirred in some obscure corner of my mind, and asked if this remark was really germane to the matter. And when Dr. Thorpe repeated after me, "Nor brothers brothers, as you say, Joe dear," it threatened to become more audible, and I was fain to silence it by an effort of will.

We walked in and about the grounds and quads of the Colleges, stopping a good deal, I remember, in the quad of University, because the Doctor liked the mouldering stone (it has been made quite neat and tidy many years ago now), before we turned back to my rooms. We talked over every aspect of Lossie's engagement except the one uppermost in both our minds, and this we scrupulously avoided. Each of us knew the other's thoughts, but neither communicated his own—unless indeed a lengthened-out grasp of the hand in silence when we parted at the Railway Station could count as a communication. I persuaded the Doctor not to stop on; or rather I should say my way of asking him to stay was unconvincing, and he decided to hold by his statement that he must be back at Poplar Villa by nine o'clock. His judgment that this was best for my sake was perfectly right. The light feverish attack that followed would have been ten times worse if he had stayed.

After I had taken leave of him I went away for a long walk towards Witney, but did not go so far, although I had a vague intention of doing so. I turned back at Eynsham and got back to College long after feeding-time. But I did not want anything to eat—I wanted to find out what had happened—to be able to visualize or localize the event—to make the simple fact I had just heard, that a young lady I knew was going to make a most fortunate marriage, take its place quietly among other facts, and settle down for me to deal calmly with it. It was a most reasonable thing in itself. Why should it roar and throb in my brain, and make my eyes and my palate dry up? *I* was there, all right enough! It had not hurt *me*. I was looking on perfectly calmly at a brain that persisted in throbbing, and at something that was swelling in the throat of an unreasonable young man—unreasonable in being so strangely affected by something *I* had just heard—something which, if he had had a spark of real good feeling or common sense, he would at once have seen he ought to rejoice at. I was angry with him for his selfishness, but I was so concerned for his burning palate that I got him some brandy and soda, the only thing he could swallow. He drank it down and lit a pipe, and the effect was thus far good that he partly perceived his identity with myself.

He and I then (to pursue my attempt to picture a frame of mind that was perfectly real, and can be explained in no other way) sat smoking in the half-dark, trying to get things into order. We needed no light, for the harvest moon was very large and very golden, and meant soon when it was well up to bathe Oxford town in silver. I tried to remonstrate with him, and pointed out his absurdity in expecting that Lossie Thorpe should always remain as it were on draught, for his special behoof and satisfaction when he went up to town—"Do you imagine," I asked, "that her father, her sister, or her brother ever contemplated that she would remain at home indefinitely for *their* sakes. And who are *you*, that you should claim what they do not? Or do you really mean, you presumptuous young ass, that your silly boyish aspirations lay claim to be considered Love—Love with a big L, that produces Marriage and Jealousy and Murder and all sorts of grown-up things that boys in their second year at Oxford have really no business with? If so, I must trouble you to remember that you are between nineteen and twenty, and Lossie Thorpe is a woman of twenty-four——"

The other-self young man interrupted me, with more spirit than I had given him credit for: "I cannot analyze what is meant by Love, nor can I say what it is in her father's, brother's, sister's affection that differs from mine. I only know that when she goes out of my life, a Light disappears from it that will never return, and for which no substitute is possible. And I know there is no exit from my life for her so effectual as Marriage with another man. Death would separate us less."

"You are a foolish young undergraduate," I replied; "I shall go to bed and try to get a little sleep."

I did so, but I could not sleep a wink, or rather the other young man could not. Of course if he had not been me it would not have mattered; but he persisted, and the fact that I was in perfect health, quite calm and collected, and not the least overworked, was allowed no weight whatever. He lay there staring into the darkness (for I had shut the moon out) and listening to the chiming of the hours, which seemed to follow each other too quickly, without the least affecting the total length of the night. His brain went on burning—his palate got drier. Consequently I got no sleep, and when a gleam of dawn and a sound of sparrows gave me an excuse for getting up, I was just on the point of doing so when this inconsequent young man's system suddenly recognized the fact that it was worn out, and made me fall into a stupid sleep of unrecollectable dreams, which shortly became torpor, from which I woke slowly and painfully to find the world all alive, and the bell ringing for chapel.

At first (of course) I could not tell what had happened—I only realized that there was an awful Something that would have to be recollected soon. It was useless attempting to preserve my torpidity to avoid it. It came, without remorse! And I knew that in this next year to come what had been music in the past ten years would be silence—what had been sunlight would be shadow. I had realized that, even if Lossie lived in England still, even if I could go to her as of old for sympathy in trouble and encouragement in work, it would not be the same thing. And in this fact lay the worst sting. She, I knew, would love me with just the same love she had given to the little boy that picked the pears; but I had made a dreadful discovery about the nature of things human, and the gruesome task before me was to conceal that discovery from Lossie. Her father knew it, and I knew he knew it, but I could see in a hundred ways how entirely unconscious she herself might be. If the slightest doubt about this could have crossed my mind, it must have been dissipated by the letter, delayed in the post (or wrongly delivered at first), which I found on my breakfast plate when I at last appeared, presenting to my scout a haggard face, which I think he ascribed to a last night's orgie:

"Poplar Villa, Aug. 14, 1860.

"My dear little Joe: You will be so glad, I know, to hear of the great happiness that has come to me. I am engaged to be married to General Hugh Desprez. You know all about him from the newspapers. Don't you remember how we read about the relief of Lucknow, two years ago, and you said of all the men you would 'like to be you would soonest be Colonel Desprez'? And he is that very same Colonel Desprez and he is as good as he is great and brave, and I am indeed a happy woman. I have told him all about you, dear Joe, and he is so anxious to know you—and you may fancy how I look forward to your knowing him. The only blot on the 'scutcheon is that I shall go to India and have to leave Papa behind and my two Joes—my little brother and my other little brother—and the others. But I shall go, and then when I come back I know I shall find a distinguished Oxford Graduate. How I shall look forward to getting the news when your year comes! I should like to write so much more, dear Joe, only I have so much to write.

"Good-bye, dear. Ever your affectionate,
"LOSSIE."

I turned it over and found on the other side written "Do you know you are quite the first written to of everybody—all but Sarry, and even her letter isn't posted."

Others who know and understand women better than I do may be able to detect in this letter a consciousness of concealing the fear that the news would be unwelcome to me. I can see no sign of any feeling Lossie would not have had in writing to Joey or Nolly. Only that, had it been the latter, she might have been less affectionate. She and Nolly were not such chums as we had been,—she and I!—

The great soldier and Lossie's intense unconsciousness made me feel so keenly the presumption of the young man with the parched throat and the throbbing temples that I compelled him to eat some breakfast to show how capable he was of going through with the part that had been forced upon him. He showed pluck to the extent of a cup of coffee and half a roll—but I let him off any more, for really the food choked him. (I adhere to this young man as a figure of speech—because he makes explanation so easy.) He was very anxious that I, being perfectly cool and collected, should forthwith write a letter for him to Lossie, expressing his delight at the news, and carefully concealing every trace of the effect it had had upon him. He was in such a hurry for me to do this that he hardly had patience to wait till the breakfast things were cleared away. I got the letter written with some difficulty, for he was not easy to satisfy, and after it was posted wandered aimlessly about, or rather, I should say, consented to his doing so. For I personally could see no reason why he should not go back to his rooms and get on with the Epinicia. By this I mean to express that I said to myself a hundred times that nothing had happened that ought to alter my life for this day, or for any day—that I ought to be able to get on with my reading—that although some acknowledged title or claim to misery would have been a great alleviation, I had none. Only the misery itself!

I had many nights of sleep that dreaded waking from fear of the return of the spectre that was always with me in the daytime; of sleeplessness that dreaded sleep as nothing but the road to a new recognition of the spectre, happily forgotten for a moment;

many days that it was easiest to spend out of doors, but haunted with a wish that every one else would keep in doors, and above all not speak to me when they met me; many such nights and days before Youth and Life reasserted themselves and laid claim to their rights in me. At their dictation a compromise was effected, and the black Shadow that oppressed me was bidden to disperse and scatter itself over the remainder of my earth-life, as a compensation for relinquishing its prey of the moment. My record was to become legible again, but on grey papyrus.

Many things of great moment to myself, and some of interest to others, have been chronicled on it since then. But however black may be the blots that have fallen on its pages, however strongly they may start out from the ground on which they have fallen, it has never been white as of old, and I have never altogether lost the consciousness of the grey.

I wonder, if at the request of Fate a dramatist took it in hand, and schemed to work in a white sheet or two before Finis, what he would find to write upon them!

CHAPTER XX

LETTERS OF LOSSIE, VERY IMPORTANT. GENERAL DESPREZ. HOW SHE TOLD ABOUT JOE—HOW THE GENERAL WANTED TO MARRY LOSSIE—FULL DETAILS OF ALL HE SAID, BUT NO STAGE DIRECTIONS. HOW JOE'S TRAGEDY BURST SUDDENLY ON LOSSIE, AND SHE ORDERED THE GENERAL TO THE RESCUE.

It is fortunate that Lossie's correspondence at this date was preserved, for it gives us what could not possibly have reached us in any other way. The following extract from a letter to Sarita Spencer (dated The Croft, Langport, Somerset, Aug. 6, 1859) is not absolutely necessary to the understanding of the next one, but it contains allusions to myself, and leads up to it, naturally enough.

". . . We *are* having a jolly time down here. I only wish you were here with us instead of in that stuffy London. The place is delicious, and what with riding in the morning, and being taken out for drives in the afternoon, and getting up extempore dances and theatrical performances in the evening, I can tell you the time passes at a great rate. I shall be so sorry for myself when I come back in a week. Lady Vandeleur says the remedy is easy—*not* to go back. I'm not sure it wouldn't be kinder to London if I didn't, for my temper will be unbearable!

"The Vandeleurs are perfectly delightful people, who seem to take clover for granted, and accept good fortune as a birthright. That is to say, they do so in all matters of practical detail, never hesitating to order anything on the score of expense. But when it comes to general principles, they pose as *usual people,* who have just the same sort of income as the persons they happen to be talking with at the moment. When one hears Rosalind (that's Lady Vandeleur) talk of 'really rich people like the Poltergeists' one pities her and fears for her solvency, and it requires some little corrective like hearing her talk about 'people with only a thousand a year' to make one feel cheerful about her. I talked about this way folks have to General Desprez, who is staying here (of course you know all about him), and he replied, 'I know Lord

Poltergeist intimately, and what you tell me Rosalind said comes very funnily, because it so happens that he said to me, less than a year ago, that people who had really no responsibilities, like Jack Vandeleur and that pretty wife of his, could fling their money about as they pleased, while as for *him* almost every penny of his huge income was bespoke, and only just enough left to give a chop to a friend who came to see him in the Albany! I asked if it really was a chop, that time, for I conjectured these two old bachelors were hob-nobbing at the said Albany when his Lordship (whose name I haven't got quite right—but no matter) made his remark.

"'A sort of metaphorical chop,' said the General.

"'Come now, General,' said I, 'don't be evasive! Tell me honourably, because you know you recollect perfectly well what the metaphorical chop consisted of.'

"'Grouse and Château Lafitte. But, my dear Miss Thorpe, if you'll take the word of a middle-aged soldier who has knocked about the world and seen a many sights, all these things are relative. The Chinaman who sleeps where he stands, works eighteen hours a day, and lives on a spoonful of rice, would consider the Italian bracciante rich on six lire a week: the Italian in his turn would consider the British workman, with six and eightpence for his ten hours' day, a regular millionaire. Of course Rosalind Vandeleur thinks Poltergeist rich, because he has eighty thousand a year and she has a miserable twelve or fifteen. I have heard her speak of eight hundred a year as poverty in the presence of young couples living on three-fifty. And what is funny is that they have considered themselves bound to sympathize!'

"'Because they were such Humbugs,' said I.

"'God bless me, my dear,' said he, quite paternally, 'you don't mean that they ought to have taken up their parables (never knew what that meant!) and preached a crusade against the purse-proud. Besides Rosalind would have broken her heart if she had known—of course she thought these nicely dressed three-fifty folk were a sort of comfortable customary thousanders. According to her Sociology, you know, people have a thousand a year by nature, less by accident, and more by expectations which fructify.'

"'My father,' said I, 'has seven hundred a year and what he makes by writing scientific articles for journals. But I'm quite sure he spends two hundred at least in all sorts of benefactions outside his family. Whatever would have become of my brother Joey Vance, but for papa, I can't imagine.'

"'What an unaccountable girl you are!' for the General and I, let me tell you, are on very free and easy terms—a sort of considerate assurance he has does it. 'How on earth *can* you have a brother named Joey Vance when you're Lucilla Thorpe?'

"'I mean to have as many brothers as I please, with all sorts of names.'

"'You mean I'm inquisitive. So I am!'

"'Then I'll tell you. Joey Vance is a young man I take a great interest in. He's at Balliol, and is expected to set the Thames on fire one of these days.'

"'Which of these days?'

"'What a lot of questions you are asking, General! Are you fond of peacocks?'

"'Very. But I want to know about Joey Vance.'

"'Let's walk round the rose garden before we go in. I like strong tea—it won't be too strong for me.'

"'Well—I suppose I must risk my nervous system. However, if I do, you must tell me all about Joey Vance.'

"You know I am always ready enough to talk about Joey—and when in addition to that one is catechized by a great handsome Hercules of a man with a thoughtful face—well, what else could I do?—of course I told him all about Joe's first appearance, and subsequent career—and how we expected him to take a very high degree. He dropped his half-jesting tone and spoke seriously.

"'How old was the boy when your father made him read Euclid?'

"'Only eight. Wasn't it lucky Papa finding him out?'

"'Indeed it was! And how long ago was that?'

"'Well—Joe's between nineteen and twenty—so you can do the sum! I was between fourteen and fifteen and now I'm twenty-five, nearly. I've no objection to your knowing my age.'

"'Are you really as much as that?' said he. 'I never should have thought it. Guess how old I am——'

"I told him I had been told that already—so it wouldn't be fair to guess. . . ."

Sarita Spencer ought to have torn up the following letter. Perhaps she would have done so had she lived. As it is, it has come into my hands—and may take its chance of being read by you.

"THE CROFT, LANGPORT, SOMERSET, Aug. 9, 1859.

"MY DEAREST SARRY: I am feeling dreadfully embarrassed, so far as a girl whose head is going round can be said to feel anything. Especially when she is pretending that her head isn't going round. I hope it's all right, and that I'm awake! I shouldn't like to wake up and find it wasn't true. Even if I'm asleep I suppose I must keep my promise to you in the dream that I made to you awake years ago, and that I've been meaning to keep ever since, as soon as there was an opening. For you see, dear, the fact is I've had an offer of marriage, and I'm bound under the terms of the compact to tell you EXACTLY what the gentleman said and did—No! stop a minute! It was no such thing—I only promised to tell what he *said*—and I'll throw you in what *I* said. I can't tell you how much easier that makes it—I can fulfil that promise honestly.

"First of all, I'll tell you his name. It's not in the contract, but I'll be liberal and throw it in too. He's General Desprez, and he's *the* General Desprez. He's a first cousin of Rosalind Vandeleur. All these people are each other's cousins, or connections by marriage. If I marry him I shall be well connected and all my friends will cut me. I shall be, according to Professor Absalom, a silver-spoon person, and quite unfit for human company.

"I'll make a small further concession and tell you where the affair came off—*that's* not in the contract either! It was in a little square-walled garden called the Rose Garden, and there are peaches and nectarines on the very high walls, and he and I were walking round and keeping off the grass because of the dew—at least I was. There was no one else there except a peacock. Now do admit that I'm liberal! I wasn't the least bound to tell you about the peacock! Here is the whole of the conversation, from the moment we met—

"'You're early this morning, General!'

"'Am I? I suppose it's seven o'clock.'

"'It isn't even that, if the negro hasn't turned round in the night when no one was looking, like the two S's in Skinner Street. By-the-bye, General, why is it that one associates negroes with sundials?'

"'I don't think I know any but this one. He's made of lead. But tell me about the two S's in Skinner Street.'

"'It's some nonsense of Papa's. Somebody asked him what his Doctor's degree was, and why he was called Doctor. He said he didn't know, because he had two degrees—one a German, the other Oxford. He said for anything he could do to regulate it, it might be they changed across every other day, like the two initials in Skinner Street—which a policeman whose mind was affected complained at headquarters about.'

"'I suppose it's the word German put it into my head. Why didn't your sister marry the young German?'

"'Poor Hermann! It's a pity she didn't—I liked him much better than—the man she's engaged to now.'

"'Whose name you told me and I've forgotten it.'

"'Sir Richard Towerstairs. She has been engaged four or five times, but I really believe she'll marry this one.'

"'Does she love him?'

"'Oh dear, yes! But she loved all the others, one down t'other come on!'

"'You frivolous young woman! Can't you be serious on a serious subject? On *the* serious subject?'

"'Yes. But not about Vi's engagements.'

"'It was serious enough with poor Hermann. Wasn't he very miserable when your unfeeling sister—jilted him?'

"'You were going to say chucked him, and of course it would have been vulgar. But there's nobody here but the peacock. Oh no! Hermann wasn't hurt. I was taken in at first and tried to console him, but——'

"'But what?'

"'Well, he took so very kindly to being consoled that I was obliged to——'

"'I understand. Poor Hermann! And then I suppose when there was no third sister to apply for he went to look for somebody else.'

"'I gave him an introduction to a girl named Atkins. Aren't people queer? However, it was good for me, because Hermann had given me some most lovely embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs, and instead of giving them back I kept them as a commission on Sylvia Atkins. I told him I should.'

"'Perfectly fair! But I want to know why you think your sister will marry this one.'

"'I hardly like to tell you, but it's difficult not to tell when you look so earnest about it. Because he's a Baronet.'

"'Is it possible that that should be really so?'

"'Yes. And I can tell you why. Vi is absolutely incapable of caring more about any one person (man or woman) than another. It isn't that she cannot feel affection, but that it doesn't much matter to her who she feels it for. The mere raw human creature supplies no distinctive attraction. It needs some external attribute which is not itself.—If she had been Hero she would not have welcomed Leander. He was altogether too crude and uncooked.

Now if he had come with a coronet, or a cheque-book, or a mitre, or a pedigree, it would have been another thing.'

"'But the German Leander swam ashore with a cheque-book.'

"'He did—but then the moment they quarrelled there was no tie left but the cheque-book, and Vi could distinguish that mercenary motives were low. It froissé'd her self-respect. But with this man, if she quarrels with him about any of the things he knows enough about to feed a quarrel on—horseflesh, cigars, cards, wine—there will always be the great and glorious sheet-anchor of his ancient lineage to keep her steady. She will never despise herself for reverence of ancestry.'

"'This Leander swims ashore with a pedigree. But do you think you will like your brother-in-law?'

"'I don't think about it. I am perfectly certain I shan't. Really when his formal welcome into the family was going on, and he considered it his duty to call me Lucilla and inflict a——'

"'Kiss?'

"'Family peck upon me I felt I could have sunk into the earth. I should like to go and live abroad to be out of his way, only I should have to leave Papa and my two Joes.'

"'I wish I could persuade you to go to India.'

"'Are you in such a hurry to get rid of me? Besides, what should I do out there—go as a nurse?'

"'No. My idea was that you should go out as a General Officer's wife. I know of a Vacancy.'

"'How do you know the General Officer would like it? Why do you look so?—is anything the matter?'

"'Yes—plenty's the matter! Now do let's walk quietly round the garden, like this, and I'll explain. You see, I suspect you of being absolutely the dearest woman in the whole world, and I know I myself never saw another like you. Now you understand! No—don't run away. You see *I* am the General Officer and I want you to marry me and come to India.'

"'Oh, how stupid I was! I always thought it was a General Officer, like a general servant. I never realized that *you* were a General Officer. I thought of you only as a General or Major-General. Indeed I did! And do you really expect me to say yes or no to a question like that offhand, before breakfast?'

"'If it's more likely to be yes by waiting till after breakfast, let's have breakfast first.'

"'Are you sure you really care which I say—yes or no? Oh, *do* take care, I'm sure there's somebody coming!'

"'It's only the gardener—he's going the other way. It's all right.'

"'No, indeed, he's coming this way—do let's be a lady and gentleman taking an early walk before breakfast.'

. . . .

"Now, Sarry darling, I've kept my promise, and more. For I've not only told you what he said, but what I said, and how the whole thing worked. You can write in the stage directions to the above little drama much as you please. The action of the Dramatis Personæ is nearly always the same.

"I don't exactly know when I accepted this soldier of mine, nor precisely whether I ever did accept him at all. We fell into rank somehow as two people entitled to pæans of congratulation; all the women (married and single) saying they wanted him for themselves, but if any one else is to have him they are so glad it's me! Rosalind Vandeleur says she really believes all the girls did want him, only that he was always so reserved and cautious that he won't leave a single broken heart behind him. I said I shouldn't have thought him so particularly reserved and cautious—and she said well perhaps not—it all depended on circumstances.

"He says, however, we are not engaged—oh dear, no!—till Papa, etc. Of course not, but as if I didn't know Papa! However, we are going up on Saturday to present ourselves at headquarters. I hope you see how military my language is becoming. . . .

"My dear, I should like to tell you how happy I am—but I can't find the words. Oh, the delight of waking in the morning and knowing half awake that as soon as one can recollect what it is there will be something indescribably glorious. . . ."

"Aug. 16, Poplar Villa.

"I will go on with my story where I left off.

"Hugh and I came up on the Saturday, as I said we should, after four more most delightful days at Crofts, which I shall never forget as long as I live. I can't tell you how sweet Rosalind and her husband and all of them were. It was a sky without a cloud, and Hugh was the sun in it. That's a very bad simile, but I always get in a mess when I try to be poetical! But it's right enough on one point—as to the chill one feels when a cloud takes the edge off one's enjoyment of it. You know what it's like, and how one says it isn't going to rain, or only a few drops——! Well, we came back from Crofts—and all went well—more than well! Papa was, I need hardly say, a darling—came out to the door to meet us; and never taking the slightest notice of poor me, all but embraced the General in the heartiness of his welcome. It can't have been difficult, for it's simply impossible to see Hugh and not love him. Rosalind says so—everybody says so. By-the-bye—I don't think I have ever mentioned that he's the youngest General in Her Majesty's service. Of course it doesn't matter, but one has an idea (or I had) that Generals are all elderly.

"'Now where's my undutiful daughter?' said Papa. 'Come and be blown up! What do you mean by looking so blooming, eh? I wonder who you'll get engaged to be married to next without my consent?'

"Poor Papa! Evidently the iron of his paternal experiences of Violet had entered into his soul, and he thought he was going to go through it all again. It would have been mere hypocrisy not to recognize the bearing of the remark.

"'Violet began at sixteen,' said I. 'Never mind the snuff—it's only my travelling things. Besides, I'm *not* engaged without your consent; I'm not engaged at all, yet——'

"'No,' said Hugh, indiscreetly, 'we're not engaged at all yet——'

"'Oh,' said I, interrupting him, '*you're* not engaged, aren't you? Very well—go away—I don't want you. However, you may have some tea before you go, and soon as you've done over-paying the cab we'll go in and get it. Where's Beppino?'

"'Who's he?' said the General, and I explained that it was an extra name for my blood-relation Joey—made necessary by misunderstandings. 'Then,' said he, 'who's Beppé?'

"'Why, of course, dear Goose,' said I, 'that's an extra name for Joe Vance! Joe for one and Beppino for the other works best. Come along.'

"So we all came along into the drawing-room, after I had received the benediction of Sam and Anne, and for that matter of the cabman, whom I heard from afar sharing his views with an acquaintance named Nosey, who had helped to bring in the luggage. These were to the effect that it was in the interest of drivers that fares should be nuts, the condition so described tending to produce liberality in an otherwise stingy public. I didn't hear the exact words, but am sure of the substance.

"'But where *is* Beppino?' said I, as I grabbed my unforwarded letters.

"'Joey was here a minute ago,' said Papa.

"'Master Joey was here when the cab rang,' said Anne. 'I'll run and find him, Miss,' and off went Anne. Some inner susceptibility of mine whispered that it would have been better pleased if Beppino had received us with acclamations at the gate, and went the length of adding, 'As Joe Vance would have done.' It was the first little chill I had had—however, I was perhaps unreasonable. As for Vi, I can't swear that I didn't feel a tiny scrap of relief on hearing that she was going to be in to tea, as I had had a misgiving that, if already in to tea, she would conspire with Aunt Izzy to give us a ceremonial reception.

"However, to condense my narrative, Joey was captured by Anne and made some effort at apology based on the great interest of the work he was reading. He was rather sheepish with Hugh, I thought, or perhaps was a little frightened of him. Vi came in as promised and accepted the peck (or rather pecks) of the new member of the family, with a very much better grace than I had received *her* young man's with. But then just look at the difference! As Vi herself said to me in my room that night, when we had a good talk over it, kissing Sir Dick is like kissing a tobacco shop in Piccadilly. As for Hugh, his appreciation of this part of the performance was candid, to say the least. I was obliged to tell him that comparisons were odious.

"Poor Aunt Izzy was all kindness, or intended to be so. The moral of the interview with her I should say was that you had better not talk Debrett to any one who can't hear a word you say. I had warned Hugh that he would have to form square to receive the Peerage, so he knew what was coming. 'But why not let the dear old lady talk about it?' said he. 'You've no idea what pleasure it gives them!' I saw he had a false image of Aunt Izzy in his mind, and tried to correct it without injustice to Aunty. 'You know,' I said, 'poor Aunty isn't exactly what one describes as a dear old lady. She's very good, you know—as good as can be! But all the same she's an Honorary Secretary, and has the welfare of her sex at heart—and indeed of everybody else's sex too. But then, that is her Advanced Self which has Platforms and denounces all sorts of things, and behind it all is a Superior Self enshrined in its own extraction from the Thorpes of Thorpe, and cherishing memories of people almost too well-connected to live. She doesn't talk much to her nieces about them. Indeed, I think she regards us as Renegades, who from sheer innate Vulgarity of Soul selected a Member of the Middle Classes for a Mother. Mamma was a School-Mistress, you know, and Papa fell in love with her—she was very beautiful—you'll see her portrait—at some lectures he gave on Education—fell over his Lecture table he always said.'

"You see, Sarry dear, I did my best to introduce the family, and prevent Hugh being taken aback. So I hope he wasn't much disgusted at having to shout into an ear-trumpet that he knew nothing personally about William the Conqueror, having only come to England since the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and that even his poor cousin Lord Fitzbroughton was only a direct descendant of a wool-broker in James the First's time who was created because he lent His Majesty money.

"'Do put yourself a little further back, Hugh dear,' said I. 'Just look at poor Aunty how shocked she is!'

"However, the reason why Aunty looked shocked came out later when it became manifest that she had scarcely heard any of Hugh's communications. For after passing the evening with an evident weight on her mind, she unburdened herself to me as we were lighting bedroom candles, being I suppose afraid she might be sleepless without explanations.

"'But, Aunty dear,' said I, after mastering the point involved, 'Hugh never said he was *any* relation of Edith Sant's.'

"'Well, my dear, I certainly *thought* he said so, and I think if you ask him you'll find I'm right.'

"'Hugh,' said I, shouting across the room, 'what relation are you of Edith Sant's?'

"'Is it a conundrum?' said he. 'I don't know, I give it up.' And, indeed, we all gave it up, until by good luck we got a clue from the word conundrum, which Aunty's ear perverted terribly.

"We were all *talking* about the Conqueror, dear, all the time. And I couldn't imagine why Edith Sant! Because *she* certainly has nothing to do with the Conqueror.

"Perhaps, Sarry dear, as you've got it all wrote out quite plain on the last page, you'll see what it all came from. But I assure you that even with the Conqueror clue we were a long time getting to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Aunty was greatly relieved, because Edith Sant, though very nice of course, is not exactly! 'As your sister Violet says, dear,' said Aunty, 'Edith Sant is not exactly.' So I had the authority of both for this curious fact.

"Nolly came in five minutes before dinner in a dust-coat over cricketing flannels, having scored seventy-two and not out. The frame of mind generated by an incident of this sort is not favourable to introduction of future brothers-in-law. In the present case Nolly's inattention to the question before the House, which was absolute, became warm appreciation of its merits the moment it transpired, to my surprise, that the General was an historical amateur Wicket-Keeper. The distinguished services of Colonel Desprez during the Indian Mutiny, and before that in the Crimea, did him no doubt great credit, but what are mere human distinctions of this sort! Let him who aspires to true Fame keep wickets. I was glad of Nolly's fervent appreciation of Hugh, although no sooner was the wicket-keeping revelation made than all conversation threatened to merge in dry wickets and wet wickets and soft wickets and hard wickets and flat wickets and even wickets. I was obliged to threaten to break it off in order to give any one else a chance. Nolly was promised another innings, and I believe had it later, after we women had carried off the bedroom candles and I was recapitulating with Violet in peace. She, I may mention, had vanished, by the time Nolly returned, to go to the Opera with her Baronet's married sister, and he was delivering her, like coals, out of a two-horse carriage and oppressive footmen just as I was thinking of getting to sleep. I called her into my room, and she came in and sat on the end of the bed in her things. Vi really does look lovely *en grande tenue,* twenty-seven or no!

"'I didn't know, Lossie dear, that your new soldier-man knew Sir Richard.'

"'Well, now, Vi! That's a shame. You know perfectly well he's the only man I ever set up for myself, and you call him my new soldier-man.'

"'Oh!' said Vi. 'But *did* you know he knew Sir Richard?'

"'Then those men are smoking downstairs still!' said I. And, Sarry dear, if you find this conversation inconsecutive, I can't help it—I am only recording the words as they came. You see, Vi and I have conversed on these lines since childhood, and after all we *are* sisters.

"'Well, Lossie dear, if he doesn't know Sir Richard what does he mean by saying to him, "So you're come to an anchor at last, Dick!"?'

"'I don't remember his ever saying he didn't know him,' said I. 'And they all know each other, all this sort of people, and Christian-name each other—I suppose they were at Eton together. What did you mean by "Oh"?'

"'Mean? Nothing. What should I mean?' And as I really could not think of anything she could have meant unless it was an allusion to Hermann when he came to me for consolation and found it not and was referred on to Sylvia Atkins, I don't know. So I let it drop as we had plenty to talk about.

"'Are you girls going to stop chattering and go to bed?' called out Papa an hour after from the library, where he writes ever so late. And then as Vi opened the door and floated away, I caught the sounds of a Baronet and a General and a Cricketer dispersing, and taking care to make no noise, on the floor below. You know what that sounds like? Then oblivion. And then I got up and wrote to Joe Vance at Balliol."

From same to same—dated Poplar Villa, Aug. 22, 1859.

"Dearest Sarry: I am quite heart-broken! Oh, why is it that there never can be any happiness at all for any one, without something to spoil it all? Why must there always be some gall at the bottom of the cup? I would have given worlds this should not have happened—I almost think that if I had foreseen it I should have run away from Hugh (that's the General) that day in the Rose Garden at Crofts and never gone near him again. I should like to be as miserable as I am afraid I have made some one else—but I've told you nothing! I must try to get in order. I'll begin at the beginning.

"I had such a nice cheerful letter from Joe in answer to mine telling him about the General, saying what fun it was, and fancy me engaged to be married! The letter was full of all sorts of jokes, picturing me in my new character of married woman. He rallied the General on his courage, wondered whether he had any idea what a firm disciplinarian I was, how many cigars a day I should allow him, and would he be taken to church three times on Sunday, and so on. You *never* could have *imagined* to read such a letter that—well, now! I don't know how to finish the sentence—I must just go on with my story and you must guess——

"I was beginning at breakfast to moot the point of when Joe Vance would come to London, and Nolly was disparaging hard reading, and pointing out its bad effect on mind and muscle, when Papa suddenly remembered that there was a skull at some place in Oxford he would like to see, in connection with gorillas' occiputs, and said if Hugh would undertake to keep me out of mischief he would run down and see the skull and Joe, and bring back word when he thought of coming to town. I told him Joe would come at once if I wrote for him, but there were such a lot of things to do I had left him to stand over for a week as I wanted to really see him when he did come. However, Papa seemed to prefer to go, and went away by the late train from Paddington.

"The first glimmer I had of anything amiss was due to what was in itself a most reasonable action on Papa's part. Nothing could be plainer and simpler than that he should run down to Oxford to see this skull, as he was actually writing on the subject at the time. But he laid so much stress on the advisability of seeing it, when that advisability really went without saying, that his going set up a minute current of uneasiness in a corner of my mind, which, however, resolutely refused to acknowledge its existence. Nevertheless, it felt greatly relieved when Joe's letter reached me on the second day after my Father's return, although it had not the candour to admit the greatness of the relief. The letter had one defect, however, in my eyes—it did not say when Joe was coming to London. Perhaps this was only an accident. Joe was so sure to come soon that no doubt he thought unnecessary to fix any date. I thought it safe to forget about it and take his coming for granted.

"So when Hugh said to me, 'That's a queer boy, Beppino! But when am I to see your other little brother?' I was rather glad to reply only to the first part of his speech, and neglect the last question.

"'Of course Beppino is a singular child. Papa and I think it better to leave him alone. He doesn't understand above half of what he reads.' I said this because I knew Hugh had caught him reading some curious literature.

"'How do you know that? It seems to me that he's not exactly a child, even in years. And he strikes me as being at least five years older in faculties. But when am I to see Joe Vance?'

"This time I was glad to answer the question, as it allowed me to pass over a consideration of another question which had often been a subject of serious and anxious discussion with Papa.

"'I thought he would have been here by now. As he hasn't come, most likely next Saturday.'

"'Did he say anything in his letter?'

"'Well—you saw his letter.'

"'Only Dr. Thorpe didn't speak as though he expected him to come up just yet.'

"'As though he expected him to come up just yet?' I repeated the words with something of a sudden alarm. 'Why not? Is anything wrong?'

"'Nothing whatever so far as I know. Joe's all right.'

"'Oh dear, yes, Joe's all right—why shouldn't he be?' struck in Papa, coming in at this moment. 'Who said anything was the matter with Joe?'

"'Nobody said anything was the matter with Joe,' said I. 'But you and Hugh speak in such a reassuring manner you gave me quite a turn.' And you know, Sarry dear, it *is* very terrifying to be suddenly spoken to in a reassuring manner. 'Do say now, honour bright, that when you left him at Oxford Joe was——'

“ ‘Perfectly well? Of course he was *really*—honour bright And he'll come up very shortly. No! he didn't name any day— but most likely Saturday or very shortly——’

“Saturday came and has gone—and so, I think, has very shortly Joe did not come up, or he would have been here on Sunday to certainty. I was at the window every time I heard the gate swin to see if it wasn't Joe. But it never was. And on Monday afternoon came a letter from him. Here it is—

“ ‘MY DEAR LOSSIE: I am afraid I cannot get up to London fo a few days yet. I will do so as soon as I can, but I am so desperatel behindhand with the programme I had sketched out for mysel this long that I would rather (if I may) wait a few days befor coming up. I wanted to have got through the Epinicia of Pinda before now, and really I am scarcely half-way. I am extremel well, and not overworking at all, and getting lots of sculling o the river. I will really come very soon. It doesn't matter, doe it, my putting off a little? I feel as if I ought to apologize t General Desprez for not coming at once to be introduced to him, but you will know how to excuse me and say something nice fo me, won't you?

“ ‘Always affectionately yours,

“ ‘JOE.’

“Very little in that letter, you will say. But if you will believe me, when I came to ‘I will really come very soon,’ I knew the whole truth without another word.

“Hugh was with me when I got it, but did not know who it was from, as I crumpled the envelope. But I just heard him say, ‘Oh, my darling, what is it? You've gone quite white,’ and everything swam. Then when I came to, I just threw myself on his acre or so of chest, and cried as if my heart would break.

“After I went to bed I listened for Vi to come home from seeing Robson at the Haymarket and called to her. I threw her the letter which I had under the pillow, and said, ‘Was that what you meant by “Oh,” Vi?’ And she read it and answered, ‘Yes, dear, that was what I meant by “Oh.” And what a simpleton you have been!’ But she wasn't bad—she's not bad in trouble, Vi isn't—and she came and said what she could by way of consolation.”

. . . .

From same to same. Extract from letter of Aug. 30, 1859.

“. . . After turning it well over in my head I came to the conclusion that it would be better to send Hugh than to go myelf. The critical difficulty ahead was really getting him and Joe nto comfortable relations, without which (I felt it necessary to xplain) I should not only ‘jilt’ or ‘chuck’ him, but should take Prussic Acid. He looked really terrified when he was told that I expected him to man the Life-boat and row out to the wreck. ‘And then,’ I added, ‘when you get there you'll have to drive a coach and six through the citadel, and take it by a *coup-de-main.*’

“‘It's the worst affair I've been in yet,’ said he.

“‘What a silly old sweetheart I have provided myself with,’ aid I. ‘Can't you see that what you've got to do is to walk into Joe's room and just tell him from me that you've come to fetch him.’

“‘But it's such ticklish work,’ he replied. ‘Suppose the forlorn hope comes to grief, and I spill the apple-cart, how shall I dare to bring the coach and six back to port again?’ However, I persuaded him to try, and he's gone down to Oxford to-day. He insisted on having a letter to carry to Joe, so I wrote one for him. And now that I have shuffled off all the burden of embarrassment on to Hugh's shoulders, I am waiting with trepidation for the result. Whatever I shall do when they drive up to the door (as I am convinced they will do—for I don't believe in any one refusing Hugh anything), I don't know. If I'm too stiff and ladylike with Joe, the situation will freeze and we shall get stuck, and that won't do. And if I'm too sisterly that won't do either. It certainly is icklish work. Stop! I know what I'll do—I'll go to the station nd meet them as they come out of the carriage.

“Do you know, Sarry darling, I'm convinced I shall be of the greatest service to the General in his future campaigns. I'm sure I'm a born strategist!”

CHAPTER XXI

HOW JOE AND HIS SELF LIVED IN GLOOM AT OXFORD AND WOULD NOT GO TO LONDON. HOW GENERAL DESPREZ CAME FOR THEM, AND JOE KEPT HIS SELF IN CHECK. HOW LOSSIE MET THEM ALL AT PADDINGTON.

I GET accustomed to looking these letters in the face. A few weeks since when I began to read them (for I have held to a rule of taking the letters as the dates called for them) I should have flinched a great deal over some parts of the foregoing.

I see now, all this length of time after, what a stupid letter my second one was. I suppose when the tension was new and I had all my natural reserve of strength at my back I was able to make believe, as my first letter was all right. But then at that time the whole of the punishment was falling on that second self, the young man of my metaphor, and I was cool and capable, and wrote his letters for him. A few days later he merged in me, and his washy identity diluted mine, palsied my judgment, and made me incapable of action. I really ought to have dragged him up to London at once, shown him to Lossie, and asked her to tell him not to be an ass.

But he, poor fellow, was so sick with sleeplessness, and I had almost written so weak with loss of blood, that I gave way to his prayer to be allowed to turn himself round and think, and wrote another letter for him. He should have left me alone to do it. Perhaps it does not seem so stupid a letter to you as it does to me? I wish I had some of my old letters to Lossie here now. You would understand it easily enough then.

I do not know if it would have made matters any better if I had written a less transparent excuse for not coming to London, or even if I had been courageous enough to go. I don't think I acted from any confessed fear that I should be unable to silence that other young man and keep him under. It was rather that I sought safety in solitude, and had above all things a terrible dread that I *must* hate the General. The old love of Lossie that began as she passed through the ray of sunshine from the pantry window at Poplar Villa, with a cargo of stewing pears and little Joey dragging at her skirts, was still so much of a baby love that it shrank from the idea of hating anything beloved of Lossie, and did not dare to see itself revealed in its new form—in fact, shrank from too close a definition of what that new form was. My impression is that had I had a good adviser at hand, my Mother for instance, qualified from a wider range of experience to pooh-pooh a *grande passion* for its victim's sake, pitying him all the while, I should have decided to go up to London in the course of the following week, and should probably have blundered into some *modus vivendi*. As it was I went on flinching, excruciating the position, and getting on very slowly, if at all, with the Epinicia.

My cowardice might have set up a permanent gulf between me and Lossie. But that was not to happen yet (whatever came later) and that it did not do so then was entirely due to Lossie's husband. I should have written to "General Desprez," but you must remember that I now look back at these early days through a period in which I knew him as her husband. When he died, and I need not refer now to the splendid story of his death—everybody knows it—I was able to be grateful that it was he and none other that Lossie had married.

I have great difficulty in telling after many years exactly what occurred. After a serious attempt to rearrange my ideas, all I recollect is, that some days (I cannot say how many) after my letter to Lossie I was reading or trying to read in my college room, when a step came up the stairs to which I called out "Come in"—as I knew my outer door was open. Thinking it was some books I had ordered, I did not look up, but left my head (or shall I say that other young man's head), for it ached, on the hand that supported it, and merely said, "You can put them down." Then I heard a voice that was not a bookseller's nor a messenger's ask for me by name.

I looked up and saw, to my thinking, the handsomest young middle-aged man I had ever set eyes on, and the very first thing that passed through my mind was that he was out of uniform. No doubt my subliminal consciousness had previously made a note of the fact that a soldier was in the neighbourhood. For other big men, Townrow of the 'Varsity Eight for instance, had come through that small door, making it look smaller, but no one ever thought about uniforms at all. I went on to a perception of a grave smile and pleasant voice and manner, a massive cheek-bone showing the scar of a bad sabre cut which had also touched the upper lip and left a hairless point in the moustache. One always remembers some very little thing more clearly than anything else, and I now recall this scar as his hand stroking his moustache left it visible. It was a great hand with hair on the back, strong nails and square knuckles, but blue veins in a clear olive skin. My other young man shrank from taking this hand when it came out for his, for of course he knew who its owner was but I saw the necessity for action and thrust him aside and took it myself. All I wanted to do was to avoid letting anybody know of his existence.

"Hugh Desprez," said the soldier, answering an enquiry I had not made. "May I come in?"

"Of course—please do! No! Do go on smoking—I often have lots of fellows all smoking at once in here."

"I came back through Oxford from some War Office business—I have a letter I was to give you from——" He paused half a second, almost as if he feared that the name he was about to utter would, spoken by him, grate on the other young man, of whose existence of course he knew nothing. When it came, it was spoken with great gentleness, almost apologetically:—

"—From Miss Thorpe."

"From Lossie?"

"From Lossie Thorpe," said he, and gave me the letter, which I opened at once. It ran thus:

"My dear little Joe: I have been waiting from day to day expecting you, and still no Joe! Do, dear Boy, throw the books aside for a very little while and come up and see your big brother-in-law that is to be. You have no idea how badly I want a real brother to welcome him, for Nolly only regards him as the eleventh part of an eleven, and as for Beppino, his behaviour has been scandalous. He only glares suspiciously at Hugh and very seldom speaks, and you know he can talk fast enough when he chooses. So do come soon, dear, only to please your loving big sister, Lossie."

"There's a postscript on the other side," said my visitor, and so there was, to this effect: "I shall just tell Hugh to call for you on his way back through Oxford. He had better take this letter with him."

What could I do? The task I saw before me was a clear one Lossie was quite unconscious of my state of mind—why should she be otherwise? All I had to consider was whether I could keep that other young man under. Would he not become uncontrollable in his desolation, and break out? At the same time how could I conceal his existence if I remained in Oxford to oblige him? No

—the only way of concealing anything of this sort is to behave exactly as you would have done if it had not existed.

"What time does your train go, General Desprez?" said I. This was what I should have said under other circumstances, so I said it now.

"You'll come back with me, then? That's all right! Oh, the train? There's one at one-thirty. We should have nice time for some lunch at the Hotel, and just catch it comfortably."

"I'll be ready in a few minutes," said I. And as I passed into my bedroom to get ready, I saw in the dressing-glass against the wall a haggard reflection, a lad of twenty quite worn out with want of sleep, rough-headed, jaded, pallid. It was that other young man, not doing any justice in his appearance to the intrepid resolution just formed in the heart of his original, who contrasted him painfully with the reflection of the handsome face beyond, with no smile on it now, only a troubled gravity. I wonder whether he saw, in the youth his eyes were fixed on, something that brought memories of other battlefields.

I was grateful to him for the way he helped me to ignore that other self, all the more grateful for the suspicion this glance at his reflection gave birth to that he was not altogether without a clue. The only other thing that favoured this idea was something that came into conversation during our journey up, when we had settled down towards the form of intercourse that was to be ours, and were chatting freely enough.

"I want to ask you," said he, "to forgive me for calling Miss Thorpe Lossie when I speak of her to you."

"Why on earth should you?" said I. "Of course."

"Well, you're very kind! But I don't know about the 'of course.' It might not always be felt so. It's taking your family name, you know—what you've always called her before I came intruding in like this. You see, they have so completely made me think of you as one of the family."

"It has been like that."

"And I remember that when I was a young chap—just got my ensigncy—my dear sister got engaged to a fellow. And mind you, she was the dearest sister ever a boy had—and Devil fly away with him if the very first time he saw me he didn't talk of her as Tucksey, which was our pet name for her. Oh! how I hated him!"

"Perhaps it was the way he did it?"

"If he hadn't assumed it as a right, I dare say I should only have wanted to kick him. As it was, I wanted to murder him," and the General's smile burst out all over his face as he added, "I didn't want you to want that, you know, so I just asked leave."

"And did your sister go away?" said I, for my desire to put the other young man in the background was beginning to take the form of an artificial ignoring of his indifference as to whether Lossie went away or stayed. His verdict that it couldn't matter to him where Lossie was, as he was to lose her so completely, was being set aside by me in favour of a possible conservation of some of Lossie (however little) in view of the perfect acceptability of General Desprez personally. For what Lossie said of the impossibility of refusing him anything was no mere fancy of a lovesick girl, but a simple fact which presented itself more and more clearly to me. Slight as our conversation was on this railway journey, and little as it would convey to a reader, his effect upon me in that short time was so strong, that when in answer to my question he said that his sister had died in the first year of her marriage, and then became thoughtful and silent, I began to feel annoyed with what possibly was an ungenerous feeling in the other young man, and to wish I was more entirely at liberty to feel sympathy about this sister of his. I asked what her husband's name had been.

"Towerstairs—he was a cousin of this chap your Violet is going to marry. I haven't told Lossie anything about him. I shall have to. But he's not a pleasant subject—very few people easier to hate on their merits. But you mustn't be anxious about Violet. Dick's not like him."

"How do you like Dick?"

"I don't dislike him,—rather like him, in fact—only he's not my sort. He's knocked about a good deal. But I think he's good-hearted. Don't be uneasy about Violet—God bless my soul! Why, there's Lossie come to meet us on the platform!"

So she had, and it was Paddington already. The other young man might wince, and did, but it was a stage on the way to possibility that I could stand there on the railway platform with Lossie's two dear hands in mine, and say to that other young man that her husband that was to be was, at any rate, not easy to hate on his merits.

I think the bias in his favour was much the stronger owing to his frank and absolute acceptance of me as almost a member of the family. His speaking of "your Violet" and referring to uneasiness about her fiancé as natural to me in that position, produced its effect, and gave me substantial help in keeping the other young man in the background.

CHAPTER XXII

LOSSIE'S FAREWELL INJUNCTIONS TO JOE. HIS NAMESAKE IS NOT A SOURCE OF SATISFACTION. A JOLLY WEDDING, AND THE CROAKING AFTER. LOSSIE'S SEND-OFF. POOR JOE!

HAVING no means of knowing how far my mind is peculiar to myself, I cannot the least guess whether after Lossie's marriage and departure for India, where the General was on the staff, I felt as another boy of twenty would have felt under the circumstances.

Looking back now I am able to discern through it all a dominant feeling of unflinching love and loyalty to Lossie. This never faltered in the slightest degree. If I were writing a story about another youth, such as I conceive would be practicable for the World's stage, I should ascribe to him (at the outset at least) a tendency to resentment, to discovering some fault in Lossie, some bad faith, some neglect or omission of something—God knows what!—that would have put him on his guard against himself. What on earth the rigid moralist expects a poor girl to do under the like circumstances I have no idea. But I should accept the vernacular model for a stage lover if I were concocting one with a view to probability, or rather to my idea of what correct people think probable. As it is, I am constrained by the facts; and can only record that Lossie remained to me then, as she remains to me now, one best thing that has been mine in this world. True, I have had but little of her! But what were my claims?—my deserts? After all, was I not what those young monkeys at Penguin's christened me, a little blackguard out of the streets, whom Lossie had picked up therefrom and been a sister to? Why should receiving so much constitute a claim for so much more? Or is it come to this—that no girl shall ever be kind and sweet-hearted to a male baby outside her own family, because it is sure to grow and grow and grow, and in time become that monster, a *Man,* with all his confounded passions and so forth, which he will consider himself at liberty to yawn over and discard in due course?

Nor have I any idea whether my feeling towards General Desprez, of a kind of love for him under protest, was one that many in my position would have shared. But (and this was the odd part of it) I felt that it required his presence to keep it alive. Constant personal evidence of his acceptability was needed, to keep the querulousness of my secret self, the other young man of my Oxford fever, in abeyance. He was disconcerted while I was with the General, and retired into the background. As soon as the latter became a memory he began to reassert himself and try to convert me to his illiberal and jealous sentiments. He did not succeed because by the nature of things he was compelled to share my firm and unalterable loyalty to Lossie, which forbade dislike or mistrust of any object of her affection. Indeed, the nearest approach I had to any sympathy with him on this head was in my feeling glad that Lossie's husband would be such as to lighten the task of forgiveness. This, however, involved the corollary that the absence of Lossie's husband might make the maintenance of forgiveness less easy. I feel now a little ashamed of having given way at all to the other young man, but indeed the concession was of the slightest.

I did not understand in those last days of intercourse with Lossie why she recurred so frequently to the question of my Oxford studies. Possibly it was that she knew me better than I knew myself.

"Dear, dear old Joe," she said to me once, "you will remember, won't you, how you have promised me to stick on for the degree? I don't want you to overwork, only not to let it slide because I'm gone."

"I say, Lossie," said I, "I hope you're going to recollect that the celebrated Double-First that I am to get is only imagination." And I went on to point out that it was rather hard lines on a chap to take for granted that he was going to get high Honours.

"Of course, Joe, I know it's only been pretence about the Double-First. But it was very nice pretence while it was all such a long way off, so don't let's give it up altogether. You know you may get a Double-First for all you lecture away so gravely about a chap's responsibilities!"

"A pig may fly—you know the rest."

"Stuff and nonsense, Joe! You're quite as likely as any other bird. Why are you taking a new tone all of a sudden? Suppose it was all pretence, why, let's go on pretending! Your big married sister in India will be the first to forgive you, dear boy, if you get no degree at all. But just think what she'll feel like when she sees her other little brother's name high up in both lists. Yes, I'll ease you down a few places if you insist upon it."

"It wasn't India when we pretended, and my big sister wasn't going to be married," struck in the other young man of my inner consciousness, quite audibly to me, and I think not absolutely inaudibly to Lossie. However, to drown his intrusion I said, with a sudden beaming cheerfulness and confidence, that I daresayed I shouldn't make a bad show; and, anyhow, I was going to do my best. But I only put all this side on to silence his murmur—and then I suspected myself of having overdone it. For there was grave doubt in Lossie's eyes for a few seconds, and then she suddenly changed the subject.

"I wish India was going to be half as easy in its mind about Beppino as about you, dear," she said. And as Beppino was a constant source of anxiety to me (but chiefly on her behalf) I didn't see my way to saying anything reassuring. So—I suppose in order to say as little as possible—I said, "He's rum!" Then not to seem to dismiss him too briefly, I added, "You know, because we've talked it over so often, that I don't think anything of Beppino seeming self-centred and reserved, because it will all go off when he gets older and develops."

"I know, dear Joe," said Lossie. "But all the same it would be rather nice if he were a little more——"

"Affectionate?"

"Exactly. Of course I'm sure he's very fond of me and Vi, only one likes a little more demonstrativeness sometimes. Vi calls him a selfish little beast, and says he ought to have had his nonsense flogged out of him at school."

"He would have been ten times worse—at least, that's my belief." I said this because I knew Lossie had fits of repentance about Joey never having been sent to a Public School, like me and Nolly. "But don't you fuss about him, Loss dear. He'll be all right as he grows older."

"I know we are both saying we think so, Joe. But isn't it like what one says about the Channel boat when you feel a little unwell before she starts, and every one says it will be all right when you get into the open sea, and then when you do, it's brandy and basins. Still, Beppino may be better as he grows older—who can tell? But I do certainly wish he would show some feeling somehow—if he got in a rage with Hugh for taking me away, for instance! He's so very philosophical about it."

I said that when it came to going away, Beppino would be heartbroken at parting. "He must, you know," I added emphatically. "How could he help it?" and that other young man felt a pleasure at the emphasis with which I spoke and tried to egg me on to say more. But I silenced him with an effort, and then had a misgiving that Lossie had seen the effort, for it appeared to me that she herself spoke with one. "You and Papa," she said, laying her hand on mine, "must keep your spirits up, and remember that it won't be for ever. I shall come back in a year or so—perhaps less. And you must write me plenty of letters, dear old Joe; long ones, you know, so that I shall know all about everything that goes on at home—just as if I was here! Don't get up and run away. It's only Hugh." And Lossie held my hand firmly, as if she was afraid I should come to no good if left alone. As soon as the General took my other hand she released it. I was rather glad he had come in, as I felt the other young man would keep out of sight and hearing now.

The state of tension and mutual reserve between us, always accompanied with resolute denial of any need for either on my part (in so much as I of course affirmed to myself that Lossie was unaware of the earthquake she had occasioned in the *terra firma* of my inner-consciousness), existed more or less until the excruciating day of her wedding and departure. Her wedding, and her sister's, for they were married on the same day.

Is it worth the pain to rake up my memories of that day, in order to tell a very little about it in a narrative that no one will read? But truly I can remember very little, for I was not in a state to notice much or closely. Indeed, I can only record as certain that there was a monstrous aching sensation, whether headache or heartache I cannot say, somewhere in a throng of well-dressed people, and that as it could not have existed without a local habitation, it had been provided with *me* in that capacity and afflicted me accordingly. It was mean of it to gall me then, thwarting my efforts towards a robust and cheerful attitude of mind, which I felt would be sadly wanted for Dr. Thorpe's sake. He had said to me, "Well now, Joe, whatever happens I have made up *my* mind that there shall be a jolly wedding, and I'll do all my croaking after." And I had resolved to allow *carte-blanche* to this aching later on, if only it would leave me free for these few hours.

Very few external impressions reached me through it. One was that my Father became extremely merry with champagne, and that I heard (or was afraid that I should hear) some one saying something about a vulgar fat man who talked so loud—I hope no one did. I doubt if I heard at the time that Vi's beauty and splendid get-up threw her sister quite into the shade. Probably it reached me after, but even the oppression on my mind could not close my eyes to the difference between the two bridegrooms.

Shall I find, I wonder, in those unopened letters any allusion to the last sight I had of Lossie on this last day of her single life? As I look back now what I recall is this.

We—that is to say, her father, two brothers, her aunt and myself—had taken in the library a private farewell of the two brides, from which even the two bridegrooms were excluded. All had left the room except me. Aunt Izzy after a final effort to prevent Vi and her Bart from going to the Hotel Bristol in Paris, as a friend's cousin of hers knew a lady who caught smallpox there thirty years before. This had been a favourite reminiscence always of Aunt Izzy's, because the Hotel Bristol, although less healthy than the Morgue, was very *haut-ton* in those days. So she wasn't likely to forget it now. Nolly had gone, having really unbent and come down to our mortal level—but then it wasn't the cricketing season! Joey had followed his sisters, after recapitulating various orders he had given for things to be sent him from abroad during the wedding tour and subsequently from India, where General and Mrs. Desprez were going by Overland Route in the course of six weeks. "I will, my precious child," said Lossie as she went downstairs, "indeed I will send you a beautiful figure of Buddha with a head and hands to waggle if I can find one." And then Dr. Thorpe had said, "Come along, Joe! You *must* come and see them go, you know," and I had answered, "I'm coming." And he, putting faith in that statement, went on in front.

I was not so sure I would go, though! Could I not sneak off and lie *perdu* until the carriages rolled away and the darkness descended? But Lossie herself came running back and found me there.

"Oh, Joe—dear Joe—*dear* old boy! *Don't* look so pale and heartbroken! I *shall* come back to you. Indeed I shall."

I could not say a word. And her father began calling from below, "Come, Loss, here's the General going away without you. Look alive!"

"All right, Papa, tell him to take Aunty instead."

I had begun to try to say something, Heaven knows what, when Lossie, who had distinguished herself by not crying, and had thereby, as I afterwards heard, rather scandalized her sister, suddenly burst into a flood of tears, and throwing her arms round me kissed me on both cheeks.

"Dear, dear little Boy—dear other little brother—good-bye."

My hand was on the library chair in which her father was sitting when he took me on his knee, a dozen years ago, to read the Euclid. The door that closed noiselessly behind her was the same door that she had come through then unheard, and I thought to myself how those same arms had come round my neck as I sat there, a small enquiring mind with all its life to come.

If only I could have felt now as I felt then! But I had become a man in the years between. I remained to her the child of the old time that was gone, and she could kiss me. But I could not kiss her back, though it might easily be we should never meet again.

I did not see, or at any rate cannot recall, how she left the room. What I next remember is being alone there with Dr. Thorpe.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW CHRISTOPHER VANCE & CO.'S MR. MACFARREN GAVE NO SATISFACTION. AND HOW A SUBSTITUTE WAS FOUND FOR HIM. TO DR. THORPE FOR CONSOLATION. OF AN EMPTY WHISKEY-BOTTLE.

"I SUPPOSE now your Miss Lossie's gone a-soldierin'," said my Father to me one day in the spring of the following year, "you'll be able to give a little of your time to your poor old Daddy?"

This was very unfair, but it was in my Father's peculiar style; and this style was so entirely accepted and understood by all parties from Seraphina Dowdeswell upwards, that this speech was not looked on by me as calling for refutation or comment. I accepted the implied accusation good-humouredly.

"Anything want doing, Dad?"

"No, Nipper dear, I don't know that there's anything particular, but if there was I'd go as far as three-and-six on this here young Allender not being able to do it!"

This referred to a young man of the name of Macfarren who had recently been engaged as a Secretary. Why he had been rechristened Allender was a problem to which Dr. Thorpe and I gave a good deal of attention, but entirely without success. My Father's own way of accounting for it was that he called him Allender *because* his name was Macfarren, and he contrived to imply that any person of sound mind, and not bribed or otherwise biassed, would naturally do the same thing.

"Isn't he up to the mark?"

"Yes," said my Father, in contradiction of his first indictment, "he's up to the mark fast enough, for that matter! But he's never fine enough for his own likin's, and always tryin' to put a patch on what he's done afore. If he'd keep down to the mark instead of balloonin' up, he'd do better!"

It struck me that poor Macfarren was being found fault with for a very high quality, usually coveted in young employés. But I asked for an example, towards a better understanding of the case. Whereupon my Father informed me briefly that he had instructed his Secretary to acquaint the Local Authorities that they were at liberty to go to Hell, but that under no circumstances would he comply with an instruction received from their Surveyor. "And this here young Allender, he writes a civil-like sort of letter, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth——"

"But, Dad, you know you didn't expect Macfarren to write exactly as you said——"

"Perhaps not, dear Nipper. But I did expect him to trarnslate (as the saying is) without losing all the taste of the spirit. Just you read his letter and see what he's washed it down to——"

And my Father turned over the thin pages of a copying book till he found the following letter, dated about a week since:

"Gentlemen:

"Ratchett and Paul's Factory, New Peckham Rye.

"With reference to your esteemed favour referring to Cupola at above factory we may take this opportunity of pointing out that you are in error in your supposition that we are in error in denying that the plans have been in any respect departed from, or that any infringement of the Building Act has been committed in the present construction. In conclusion we may say that we have no intention of suspending the work, as you suggest, and that we are quite prepared to defend our action in paying no attention to your instruction. Awaiting your early reply,

"we are, Gentlemen,
"Your obedient servants,
"CHRISTOPHER VANCE & Co.
"p. pr. E. M."

I was unable to say a word in favour of Mr. Macfarren's style of prose composition. But it was not this that my Father thought defective. It was the omission of any rendering of his permission to the Board of Works to go further off than Purgatory.

"He knows all the c'rect expressions, and chucks 'em in," said his employer, "but he don't work it out convincin'!" And he certainly didn't.

"What was wrong with the Cupola?"

"Nothin' whatever! But the Bricklayers refused to work on it without a centerin', said it was dangerous and they all of 'em had families. So I altered the line of the Engineer's drawing—just an inch or so—and they was all satisfied and 'appy. But then the District Surveyor shoves his bottle nose in—*his* name's Ditchfield (or Garstin, is it, I forget which!)—and *he* says, 'Stop off this here bricklayin',' says he—'you're making the hark of this here curve a good three inches less than shown on droring, and a higherin' of it up, in course, if it's to work out the same narrowness stop'—*you* understand all that, Joey hay?—it's what they call marthamarticks at your shop——?"

I understood it perfectly. Intelligibility to the Reader is not of the essence of the contract between us, at least until I have some assurance of his existence. So possibly he may not understand about the Cupola as clearly as I did. Never mind!

"And there it was, you see," my Father continued. "Two bricklayers and three labourers eatin' their thumbs off for half-a-day, and nobody to tell 'em to tell the Surveyor to 'ang himself; because I was away, and George (that's the foreman on the job) he's a narvous customer and timorous like. So when I came back to the Works here, there was George had been waitin' an hour, after drivin' his pony like mad, and then next mornin' comes a letter from the Surveyor's Orfice, and I told young Allender what he'd got to write, and you see what sort of a job he turns out.—I do hate mincin', and always did."

"If he had followed your dictation exactly it certainly would have read better. But he evidently thinks that it doesn't much matter what there is in a letter if you begin with a catch-word."

"What's that?—oh, ah, I know! When you write across the top, arter *dear Sir!* But why ever couldn't the young beggar write *Hell,* with a line underneath it, and then go on—'Referrin' to the above, etcetrer, etcetrer'?—You may laugh, Joey, but it would have had a sort of forcibleness. Now in this here young Allender's letter, I don't see where the forcibleness comes in."

"No more do I! You had better get a man who knows how to write a better letter than that. Why, he's a fool! Look how he finishes up with 'awaiting your reply' as if his letter was an enquiry!"

"Well now, Nipper dear, I thought that the best part of the letter—it looks so well!"

"You *must* consider what a letter is meant to say, Dad.—Lots of things look well in themselves, but it doesn't do to put them in other things' places."

"Right you are, Joey, sure enough!—See what a lot one larns at a 'Varsity! But this here young Allender's expressions are so conwincin' when by themselves, that there's nothing you can lay hold of to sack him by. He argue-bargues with you like a winkle that won't come out of his shell."

Nevertheless, my Father, feeling himself fortified by his counsel with me, and having as it were the University of Oxford at his back, did lay hold of something to sack Mr. Macfarren by, and sacked him. And the young man, feeling himself injured, appealed against the judgment to me—"I am confident, Mr. Joseph," said he, "that could you become fully acquainted with my usual standard of correspondence that none would be more ready than yourself to admit that the letter in question was far from equal. I feel certain, Sir, that your well-known justice and impartiality I may rely on to make due allowance for a certain amount of natural disturbance amounting to upset, and due to circumstances to which I will not further refer, and I trust you will not press for."

Considering this as an invitation to do so, and also because my curiosity was aroused, I forthwith pressed for the circumstances—and the pressure was responded to with alacrity.

"However reluctant I may be," said Mr. Macfarren, for whom I was beginning to anticipate a seat in Parliament, "to refer further to the circumstances I have referred to as undesirable for further reference, I feel that I should do less than justice to myself were I to shrink from communicating to you that on more than one occasion recently Mr. Vance has expressed himself with a warmth which—and no one can be less ready than myself to impute blame. And perhaps I should hesitate to ascribe to stimulants a momentary aberration possibly due to other causes, but can refer for confirmation to Miss Dowdeswell——"

I cut Mr. Macfarren short, as the idea of holding a court-martial on my Father for drunkenness, with this chap and Seraphina for witnesses, didn't at all recommend itself to me. But I asked Pheener whether it was true that my Father had been drunk and violent and frightened the Secretary so that he couldn't write his letters, and Pheener, though she flushed with indignation against my informant, whom she described as a "circumstantial young upstart," nevertheless admitted the truth of (I presume) his circumstances by saying, "It was only that once, after all." Pheener was a good girl, and very fond of her master, whom she would have backed up in any amount of drunkenness if the question had been under public discussion, however much she disapproved of it in private. But *was* it only that once, after all?

A new Secretary, or confidential Clerk, was soon found. An advertisement evoked one hundred and twenty-odd replies. Among others, I remember one from Penzance requiring information about exact salary, probable increase of salary, whether Advertiser was married, single, or a widower, what was his religious denomination, and so on, ending up with an enquiry whether a cat was kept, as the writer could not bear to be in a room where a cat had been. Another was prepared to concede an interview if the Advertiser was Convinced of Sin, and would write to that effect. Another was an absolute master of Short-hand, and spoke seven languages, but was starting for Shanghai in three weeks—would be glad though of a stop-gap during that period! Luckily more than a hundred were about as practicable as the foregoing, so less than twenty remained to be dealt with. My Father suggested making a bunch of them and getting Pheener to draw one, which was done; it turned out to be from Robinson in the Old Kent Road, and no sooner was he open to view than my Father repented, and said he *had* hoped it would be Pattleborough, who was twenty-seven and lived at Highgate.

"But, Dad dear," said I, "if you really saw one you had a fancy for, why put him in a bundle and then fish for him? Let's find him now and see what he's like."

We identified the answer my Father meant, but not by his recollection of it, which was fallacious. The name was Hickman, of 27 Loughborough Road. And Hickman was written to and gave satisfactory references to a fish-salesman and a dentist, and was installed as confidential scribe after verification.

I remember how serious Dr. Thorpe looked over my narrative of this incident. "I'm afraid," said he, "we shall all go to rack and ruin now Lossie's gone. Shall you write this out to her?"

"I *have* written," I replied. "And I begged her to write straight to him herself, not saying that I had told her anything, but only that it was evident I was uneasy. Just as she did that time after Mother died."

"It may do good, but it will be three months before he can get her letter, and it's a long time. I will try to speak to him myself if you like, but I don't feel that much good will come of it."

"No more do I, Doctor, to say the truth. Of course you know, I do speak to him in a certain sense, and while I'm here it will act as a check, but it's not like Lossie."

We were sitting in the half-dark of a fire-lighted room at Poplar Villa. The others had gone to bed, and I had put the moderator lamp outside to finish smoking after running down and being blown out. We sat silent as the fire flickered, and each was thinking that nothing was like Lossie. Each was a bit afraid to talk much to the other about her. So I held on to silence, and when the Doctor spoke again he harked back on the conversation.

"And what a clever man your Father would have been, if he had only had education! Fancy his knowing that a dome could be safely built without a centering! And standing out against the opinion of the bricklayers!"

"Yes—for a man who says he knows nothing about building, and never did, that's not bad!"

"But I suppose his draughtsman in the Office there backed him up—he wasn't alone?"

"Yes, he was—says they were all against him to a man. And the bricklayers refused at first to go on with it, till he altered it, and then the Surveyor cut up rough—said he knew it would be safer, but it was an alteration."

"And has your Father satisfied the requirements of the Building Act?"

"He's satisfied the Surveyor." And those who remember Præ-County-Council history in matters of London building will appreciate Dr. Thorpe's delicacy in pursuing this conversation no further. Instead of doing so he prepared to retire to his library, to do a little peaceful writing before going to bed, and I said good-night and walked away home.

I had noticed the contents of the whiskey-bottle at lunch, and knew my father had taken only a very moderate allowance, before I started to walk over to Poplar Villa. I had dined there, and he had had some dinner alone, as he was expecting some one on business later. When I arrived, I found him in the large leather chair in the Snuggery, sound asleep and snoring heavily. The whiskey-bottle was empty on the table beside him, and I looked round hoping to see more empty glasses than one, indicating that he had been helped through quite two-thirds of the bottle. But I could see none. And in the morning I noticed that my Father was ill-tempered.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOE'S DUPLEX GEAR DISCOMFORTS HIM. JUSTICE TO PINDAR. HOW JOE WENT TO LYNMOUTH WITH A READING PARTY, AND INVITED MASTER JOSEPH THORPE. THE LATTER GOES UNDER A SEA-ROCK. JOE AFTER HIM. HOW A LIFE WAS SAVED FOR ONE WHO COULD NOT USE IT FOR GOOD.

When I returned seriously to reading, the first thing I did was to put the Epinicia on the shelf and go to other work. The associations of Pindar had become painful. It would have been wiser as an act of discipline to go through them at whatever cost. I put them aside to finish later in the year, and in the meanwhile, deserving, as I thought, a little real restful luxury, devoted myself to Differential and Integral Calculus. By alternating these Scientific Recreations with the Spherical Engine and its Reciprocating Movement, I contrived to wile away a good deal of time, and to make my life endurable enough. As I have already had the originality to remark, Youth and Hope will reassert their rights even after the severest shocks. Of course *I* remained all right—almost boastfully so! It was the other young man, who being as it were *me* against my will, would make me get up off the bed where he was passing a sleepless night, to pace monotonously about over the head of a Duke's nephew underneath, who complained to the Master, and procured for me an admonition, and for himself an apology. It was the other young man who in consequence went for long walks at night; who distracted my attention in the day from whatever I was engaged on to remind me of old days at Poplar Villa; who refused to eat the food that I provided for him; who was constantly demanding the solace of a pipe, which I was compelled to smoke on his behalf. It was cruel of him, for I had also my own anxieties to attend to, about which he did not trouble in the least. He said more than once that if my Father chose to drink too much whiskey it really was his own lookout, and he couldn't bother himself about it. There was only one thing about which he and I were agreed, and that was the pipe. His retrospects about Poplar Villa and the old unforgotten time became more forgiving and peaceful, and I grew more sanguine of good effects from Lossie's letter from India when it should come, as he and I watched the smoke-rings travel across the room, and hang in the air and slowly vanish.

Still he became so troublesome whenever I went back to the Classics I had been reading at the time of Lossie's engagement, that in order to do them justice I felt a change of scene was necessary. So when an intimate College friend suggested that I should accompany him and four other fellows and a Tutor to Lynmouth in Devonshire on a reading party I accepted the invitation gratefully. His name was Featherstonehaugh, but he was called Guppy for short, by his friends.—I remember once at a place where we were playing at finding out words with ivory alphabets, I chose all the letters of Featherstonehaugh and mixed them up, and though I declared that it was a fairly well-known Scotch name, all efforts to guess it failed, and I scored accordingly.

If a man could be half-a-dozen people at once and wanted to enjoy himself thoroughly, I should recommend him to be a reading party in a fine Autumn at a seaside place in Devon. I leave other people to advocate other localities, and adhere as in duty bound to the one I got so much satisfaction from myself. It is very desirable that all danger from overwork should be avoided among young men who have only lately done growing, and the climate of Devon is a most favourable one in this respect. For if the reading-party goes out for a swim in the early morning, dressed in the most extravagantly coloured flannel shirts it can buy, and after stopping in the water too long, throws stones for quite half-an-hour at a sea-gull, who takes no notice, and then goes home to a breakfast of fish and eggs and bacon and even kidneys, and tea and coffee and marmalade and rolls and potted meat and no shrimps this morning—this reading party, I say, by the time it has lighted its pipes and settled down to work on the beach or under the trees at Watersmeet or elsewhere, will be sure to drop asleep contrary to its usual practice and to wake up and remark that it says that this will never do, it has been asleep ever so long. This is entirely due to the climate. In Scotland it is otherwise. The mountain air is so stimulating that you very soon read yourself into a brain-fever. At least so I was assured by authorities—I have never read there myself.

I really believe I was the only conscientious book-worm of all that happy party. I am sure I was the only one under a cloud, or else all the others made believe very successfully. It is quite true that one of them, named Thornberry, told me that a canker-worm was gnawing at his vitals, but nobody could have guessed it, as he was one of the merriest of the lot, and his digestion was to all appearance perfect. The entozoid he mentioned had been placed in his system by a young lady named Emily whom he had sate on the stairs with at two dances, and once met in Hyde Park. I did not reciprocate his confidence. Even my other young man didn't want me to do this.

Our Tutor had been selected with a view to non-interference, and was so often required to wink at omissions that at last, at some particular wink, his eye remained shut. He had so recently graduated that the iron of the degree had not had time to enter into his soul, and he was as a new Pope intoxicated with the security of his position and flinging indulgences about without consideration for the stock. He might also be likened to the Kaffir lately inducted into the trousers of civilisation, who cannot be relied on not to pull them off suddenly and backslide into Heathenism. He had proved a blessing to the men who coached him, Europe having come to the conclusion that the coaches who could pass J. Hall Shaw could pass anybody. And sent her sons to them to be passed accordingly.

After we had been enjoying ourselves for about a week, it occurred to me that it might be well if Joey Thorpe were to pay me a visit. It would give him an opportunity of enlarging his ideas, which I always supposed were cramped by narrow-minded tutors, and of getting his first introduction to University life in an indirect way. For his Father's intention was that Joey should sooner or later go to Oxford or Cambridge, according as the bias of his mind was towards Classics or Mathematics.

Joey came, and I had a good opportunity of finding what the boy was really like. Of course I may be said to have had ample opportunities before, as I had known him from babyhood. But while Lossie was to the fore, I lived under a spell which forbade my seeing Joey otherwise than as she wished him to be seen. I was continually disguising him in my own mind to help her to disguise him in hers. And each of us helped the other to indulge a false view of Master Joseph, who really was, to put him plainly, one of the most selfish little beggars I ever came across. When I write of him now with some impatience, please note that it is provoked by my recollection of him at this time, and has nothing to do with his subsequent misdeeds.

It was rather disgusting to me, a week after introducing him into our septemvirate as Dr. Thorpe's youngest son (the Doctor being, of course, well known by fame), to find that he had been already christened "the Cub." I knew my friends were as liberal and generous-hearted as any average lot of University boys anywhere, and I knew also that I was popular among them. So I felt this discovery, on Lossie's account. How could I write to her in India of Joey's visit, and either conceal from her or tell her he had earned this disgraceful sobriquet? Of course I was not intended to hear it; and, equally of course, I did hear it. Then regret ensued.

"I say, Pindar," said Featherstonehaugh, using my nickname at the time. For we had a profusion of nicknames, varying according to the particular study of the moment. Just now I was on my Isthmian Odes again, nearing the end.

"What's the rumpus, Guppy?"

"We're sorry, old chap."

"What for?"

"For calling little Thorpe the Cub, and you hearing it. We didn't go to do it, old chap!"

"What an old Ass you are then, Gup! Of course if you lie on your back in the sea, and shout out things to friends on the top of a cliff, everybody is sure to hear what you say."

"Sure to!" said Guppy, pulling thoughtfully at a cigar. "Sure to! But we didn't want you to, all the same."

However, Joey had got his nickname, and it stuck to him. It's not so easy to undo a thing of this sort!—So when a few days after this we were all plunging off the rocks, and Joey suddenly disappeared and didn't come up again, the cry that called my attention was, "The Cub's gone under! the Cub's gone under!"

I was across the rock starting to swim out into the outer wash of the sea; and as I heard the cry, struck back and was landed on the rock as the incoming wave rose. Within and in the shelter of the rock lay our boat; and from the heaving green mass that surged and sank as the rock-basin filled and emptied rose the heads of three who had dived for him at once—Featherstonehaugh, Thornberry, and Carvalho, the last a young man in whose face one saw an Arab or Negro ancestry written plainly. He shouted as he rose:

"He's under the rock! It's a cave—it's a cave," and instantly dived again. He was a splendid diver, and the surface smoothed over him, and I knew he was seeking about in the still green water below.

"For God's sake, you two," I shouted, "don't dive. Get to the boat." And then somehow we three were all in the boat, and I was fastening a longish rope we had with us round my waist.

"Keep hold of the end," I cried, "and pay out clear!" And down I went straight towards the rock and under the hollow of it, for the evidence of which I only had conjecture and the word of Carvalho. Had it not been as described I should have been stunned probably.—As it was I felt him slip by me, rising winded from his immersion. Down I went, and turning over saw above me—almost still—the floating body of Beppino. It was a case for a great effort, and I made it. I got him down, got him under the rock ledge, gave him a push for the open and then felt a convulsion as the water choked me. I was just aware of the rope drag as they pulled me out. Then I became insensible and knew nothing till I found myself coming to in great misery on a bed with my friends about me. It is said by many of those rescued in this way that drowning is not a painful death. But few of them have a word in favour of resuscitation.

"When you went under," said Guppy to me afterwards, "Tripey" (which was one of Thornberry's nicknames) "was taken funky and wanted to haul you out. But I told him not to be an Idiot. Then we saw the Cub's carcass under water and Blackey fetched him out, while Tripey and I got you into the boat. The way you kept slipping was enough to put one past, as Nibs at Balliol used to say. There was no keeping hold! However, we got both your corpses on board and rowed straight for the Coastguard Station, where they put hot things to your feet and waggled your arms about. The Cub came to first, and what do you think was the first thing he said?"

At this point Featherstonehaugh became convulsed with laughter.

"Cut on, Guppy! Don't go on giggling like that."

"I couldn't help smiling. Well, the very first thing the young beggar said was—you won't believe it!"

"Do cut on, Gup!"——

"'Why—didn't—you—pull—me—out?' Those were his very words. And he makes a grievance of it now. Why, you heard him at dinner yesterday!"

And indeed it was true that Beppino had confessed to a belief that we all sat on the beach and smoked for an hour or so while he was drowning. "No doubt he really thought so," said I. "Illusion—hallucination—*délassement* of the senses—all that sort of thing."

"You and your *delassmongs*," said Guppy, with an accent showing his scorn of French language and literature. "Why didn't *you* have hallucinations? *You* were clear enough when you came to."

"But what *did* I say?"

"What did *you* say?—'Is the child safe?' I think it was—or something of that sort."

Then I remembered that as I caught sight of the slim form of the Cub afloat above me I thought to myself that it was actually the chubby voluble baby of ten years ago. And that if I failed to save him I could never look Lossie in the face again!

I wonder whether if Betsy Austin (who is dusting at this moment) could be told the above story, would she find it possible to believe that the elderly studious quill-driving first-floor whom she despises, or affects to despise, for his effeminacy and cowardly shrinking from draughts; his fussiness, or tendency to take exception to raw mutton chops and under-boiled potatoes; and chiefest of all his puerile attachment to the silly game of chess—could Betsy Austin believe that he once shot into those ripples on that errand, never knowing the way would be clear? Betsy has never seen the sea, and does not wish to, having a low opinion of it; but that rock-ledge could be explained to her, and the grizzly doubt whether it went down straight or turned in cave-wise would suggest itself even to Betsy. However, I will not interrupt the dusting to get her views. Her standard of dusting is as low as Wordsworth's standard of drunkenness; and if she gives a divided attention it will be worse still.

But you, perhaps, will believe me when I say that even now I can almost hear the water in my ears of thirty-five years ago. And again I dive down, down, down, and then turn over and see my quarry above me, and it gives the slightest jerk as I seize it, and then is still. And then I use my last force to save it, and all is darkness.

I have seen that rock since, for I found it when I visited Lynmouth a year ago. It was unchanged after three decades, and seemed quite content that the ocean wash should still lisp and ripple against it as it did then. There was a merry party of boys bathing from it; and one of them, to whom I talked about the dangers of this coast, told me how the old coastguard, up at the flagstaff over there, had told him a story of how a boy had got under this very rock, and a chap had jumped in and got him out. But he added that it was an orfully long time ago, and seemed to think this a very extenuating circumstance.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW JOE WOULD HAVE TAKEN A BETTER DEGREE BUT FOR CHESS. HOW HE PATENTED HIS SPHERICAL ENGINE. HIS DIFFICULTIES WITH THE BRITISH ENGINEER. OF HOW HE IS CHEATED AND HIS FATHER COMES TO THE RESCUE.

I WROTE the last chapter for the sake of the bathing incident, and without any intention of showing that my application to reading was lessened at this date. But when I re-read it myself I see between the lines that this was the case, and that Lossie's misgivings were not without foundation. I did not become idle. But a powerful unconscious stimulus was removed—a stimulus that I myself had never realized or understood.

When a runner resolves to do his best in the race, the impulse of his first resolution lasts him to the end. His effort is automatic, and its uniformity will not be interrupted. A course of study to end in Academical honours is quite another thing; and effort may either be intensified by the introduction of a new motive, or chilled by the removal of an old one. Concurrent circumstance has its say in the matter. This is prosy, but true.

When I first became the proud possessor of my New Exercise Books at Penguin's I registered a vow of strenuous effort for Miss Lossie's sake, and the vow remained a fundamental part of my existence, without need of re-registration as long as its cause formed part of my existence too. But the cause had been tampered with, and though it still remained, its nature had been altered in some sense I had never regarded as possible, never having investigated its possibilities of change. I was not unlike the tree that blooms to the full until one day its tap-roots strike a new stratum. I was a seedling that, knowing no nourishment but one, did not even know it was nourishment until it was withdrawn.

I did not become idle. That was not in the nature of the animal. But I found out that my desire for distinction was a very shadowy one when left to itself; and although it was still actuated by Lossie from afar, it was not the same thing as having her close at hand. I began to neglect studies that I only cared for as a means to an end—the end being Honours. I might parody Crabbe and say that gradual each day I loved my Classics less, my Physics more; and I might even finish as in the original, that I learned to play at Chess. I did, and I really think Chess had as much to do as anything with the lowness of the place I took in Honours. It was a respectable place, but no more. So I shan't tell you what it was. You must look in the lists for '62.

Poor Lossie! She was sadly cut up about it, blaming herself and exculpating me. I have her letter still in which she says that she was sure it would all have been different if things had only gone on just as they were two years ago. The change was all her selfishness. "But then," she adds, "what would have become of Hugh if I had not married him?" My other self, who was scotched but not killed, said unfeelingly that that was no concern of his. There was a second letter in her envelope, from the General, and when I read it to him it made that young man feel horribly ashamed of himself: "Lossie tells me," he wrote, "that I ought to condole with you for getting down on the list as low as a place which I should have been only too proud to see a real brother of mine—get up to. So don't expect any commiseration at this shop! I've been trying to cheer her up about it, by telling her my real opinions about competitive examinations of all sorts. I hate them myself as much as I hate War. But one has to face both. What would become of Army Contractors without War, and Coaches without examinations?"

However, I was perfectly conscious that I could have scored much better if I had let the Spherical Engine alone, and discarded chess-boards altogether, instead of merely when playing Chess. One shouldn't play without a board when one has an Exam. next day, unless it's in Divinity or something of that sort. I was aware that I had not done myself justice, and my vanity got some consolation. But I was destined to humiliation, for, coming up to London after the fight was over, I sauntered into Simpson's chess-rooms and lost game after game against professional hands at the rate of two-and-sixpence each. Indeed, I only succeeded in drawing once, and then I suspect it was because my opponent took too much brandy and soda. This opponent, however, told me a story that acted as a wholesome warning. I happened to speak of the University and my recent degree, and he remarked with a sigh that there had been a time when he too was a promising young man, at Cambridge, for whom his backers predicted a high Wranglership. "But I failed," said he, "and all because of this confounded game! I got involved in it, and couldn't get free. I might have been a useful member of Society—an actuary or an average-stater or something of that sort, and here I am, a professional Chess-player, with nothing to boast of better than that Steinitz cannot give me a Knight!" I laid the warning to heart, and said check to all my chessmen.

But I was not minded to say good-bye to the Spherical Engine. Have you never when in trouble felt a relief in some form of employment that precludes thought on any other? Mechanics do this, just as much as Collecting, or Cricket, or Fishing. My reciprocating movement was an absorbing delight, and all that seemed to be wanting for perfect happiness was to see it reciprocate. The more effectively an Engine reciprocates in the brain of its inventor, the more irritated that inventor becomes at not seeing it externalized and fulfilling its destiny. As my Father was always ready to supply me with money, and as I had no scruple in asking him for it as an Endowment of Research, I devoted myself to development and construction. I alleged for the deception of all concerned, myself included, that I only did this while I was looking round and making choice of a profession. As I never took my eyes off cams and levers and journals and condensers and so forth except at meal-times or in bed, the fields I explored in this search were not extensive. But I must have been persuaded that it was genuine, for when I registered my first Provisional at the Patent Office I flattered myself that by the time it became necessary to complete the Patent, the Engine would be reciprocating and developing cumulative energy (I think that was what it was to do) and the profession would be chosen, and all honest demands and aspirations satisfied. How innocent I was of any suspicion of my own ignorance! I have since learned much of the difficulties in the path of the Inventor. I am afraid I fancied construction would be as easy as Patenting.

However, sufficient for the day was the evil thereof; and having registered this Provisional Specification, I had nine whole months before me in which to construct a Spherical Engine, and to look about me for a profession. As I have hinted above, I thought I was going to have an easy time, and I hadn't.

You can lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. The first Practical Men I applied to, on stepping out of the region of drawing and mere theory, were deeply imbued with the spirit of my old friend Porky Owls, and bristled with stubborn resistance to the reception of new ideas, or any ideas. As they were all exactly alike, one example will do for the lot. Messrs.

Ratchett & Paul, for whom my Father had built their great Iron Foundry and Engineer's Shops, had examined my drawings and pronounced them very ingenious and practicable (they were owing C. Vance & Co. a large balance), but excused themselves from undertaking them as not quite in their line. They introduced me to McGaskin & Flack, who were special in the construction of models, and would give an overpowering amount of concentrated attention to this one.

"If you'll take the advice of a practical man, Mr. Vance, ye'll give up the idea," said Mr. McGaskin, after glancing slightly at the drawings.

"I daresay the whole thing's impracticable for some technical reason I in my ignorance know nothing about," said I. "But couldn't you indicate the nature of it that I might be able to correct it."

"I wadna tak' upon mysel' to eendicate the nature of anything, wi'out a verra close exameenation."

It would have been rude to say, "Then why the Devil don't you make one?" So I said instead that I would leave the drawings and return when Mr. McGaskin had had more time to examine them.

"I couldna condescend on any parteecular defect," was that gentleman's remark when I returned a week after. "But if ye'll tak' my advice ye'll give up the idea."

"I won't take your advice, Mr. McGaskin. And if I take the drawings away I shall only go to some one else—so you may as well accept the job."

"A wilful chiel maun hae his wull," said he. But he rang a bell, which procured a boy who undertook to tell Callaghan to send Pring.

When Pring came he stood at bay at once. "You'll never make *that* work," said he. He really can hardly be said to have looked at the drawings.

"Aweel, Preeng, this gentleman's a graiduate o' the Univairsitee of Oxford, and ye'll try to give him every satisfaction. Ye'll no be takkin' any responsibeelitee, ye ken——!"

"I'll do my best, Sir. But it won't work!"

Pring had a conviction that the really essential point was that he should be satisfied of the final success of the Engine. Also he wished everything to act the other way round, to add a sixteenth to the diameters of most things, and substitute steel for iron, iron for steel, gun-metal for brass, and anti-friction metal for gun-metal. He declined to put faith in calculation, and went so far as to say that figures were misleading, and that if Tredgold (for instance) had been a practical man, he would have held the same opinion. I soon found that he meant, by a practical man, a man who was ignorant of the same theoretical points as himself. If Porky Owls had been there too, I should have been crushed under their united weights. Against Pring alone I stood firm. Indeed, Pring was at best only a weak-kneed example of a Porky, as he endeavoured to justify his *ipse dixit* by argument, which Porky never did. Perhaps he himself would not have done so had he taken less beer.

When I referred points in dispute to Mr. McGaskin, he said that "aiblins Preeng was a fule after all!" But in his heart he evidently thought that it was my Unpractical character.

However, I was paying the piper, and the piper's account ought to have contained such items as "To turning up three feet of best shafting three-sixteenths too small and polishing same according to nobody's instructions. Time and Materials so much," or "To providing gun-metal bearings and drilling out wrong. Providing bushes for same, to correct diam. Time and Materials so much," or "To arguing with you during partial intoxication. Foreman's time at 2/ per hour so much." The last item should have been a heavy one.

However, I myself raised no objection to McGaskin & Flack's charges, being deeply absorbed in the joys of construction; and the months slipped by rapidly, and would have become years, if an exorbitant statement had not attracted my Father's attention and given rise to an incident which gave me more insight into his success than I had ever had before. For his curiosity having been excited by the copious totals, he smoked reflectively for a long time over one, and then threw it across his table to Hickman, the clerk or secretary I had assisted in establishing, and who had proved a most efficient help for two years past. "You run your eye through that, James," said my Father; "I don't understand this sort o' thing myself." I did not catch what the reply was, as I was at the other end of the room, but it was something my Father said "he thought so" to.

As we sat at dinner that night—for I continued to live with him, and indeed spent most of my evenings at home—he remarked that he should be driving the two grey prads round by my Engineerin' works and he would call in and see Mr. Baxter.

"I know *him*," said he—"he's that pink sort of a carackter with no eyelashes—what's the name of those little beggars that come out o' rat-catchers' pockets and go sniffin' round?" I said ferrets. "Well, this here Baxter's like them. Ever seen the daughter?" No, I hadn't. "Well, just you see the daughter. Tell 'im to ask you to dinner."

I thought it would be bad feeling to ask to be asked to dinner to see a daughter of a ferret, with a view, as I inferred, to deriding her peculiarities. So I left that point alone, and only made a slight effort to get the Engineer named correctly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FERRET IS BIBULOUS. HOW JOE WENT TO PLAY CROQUET WITH HIS DAUGHTER. OF HER GLORIOUS BEAUTY AND ITS EFFECT ON ONE OF JOE'S INDIVIDUALITIES. HE TALKS TO A FLAT JANE. OF A GUST OF ABBOT ANSELM, AND JOE'S MEETING WITH AN OLD FOE, WHO IS FIANCÉ TO THE FERRET'S DAUGHTER. JANE IS SOMEBODY TOO. HE GOES HOME LINKED WITH HIS FOE.

NEXT morning the two grey prads awaited us at the door, and talked to each other about the flies. "They do to pull *me* about!" said my Father, speaking as a poor old man whose sorrows had to be pitied. "Leave go of their heads and jump up behind." And Pips, the groomlet, did as he was bid, and we went off in style.

The ferret was in his office, and abased himself before my Father's ample presence, his extensive black cloth, his cashmere yellow scarf and his bandana handkerchief, but especially before the glory of his Hat, that sacred Emblem of Perfect Solvency, which my Father left on his head for Public Worship until he came to anchor in the Office, when he showed his contempt for mere externals by putting it on the table with his bandana in it.

"'Appy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Baxter," said he. "Seen you afore, I fancy? Job down at Croydon! Or at Woolwich was it—one or other on 'em?" These were the merest *obiter dicta,* merely to make conversation. But Mr. McGaskin was far too conscientious a Scotchman to allow any one to *glisser* and *n'appuyer pas.*

"I couldna charge my memory just preceesely," said he. "But nae doot ye'll be right."

"I was drivin' round in the trap into this neighbourhood and I gave my son a lift. 'E 'azn't got too proud"—here my Father, who was getting very fat, rolled about as he subsided into his jocular manner—"to drive about with his pore old Daddy—hay, Nipper? Not yet a while at least."

"It's airly yet, Mr. Vance," said the ferret. "But ye'll just taste a wee drop—ye won't find better whiskey than I can offer ye."

My Father threw into his face an expression of repudiation of whiskey, of disparagement of whiskey, of doubt of whiskey, in fact of very seldom touching it! Then he tapped himself three times in front, as though to refer to his interior as a weak point in common with all mankind, and said, as one who makes a concession, "A taste."

I was sorry for the turn things had taken. But why had Mr. McGaskin never offered *me* whiskey? I had been his visitor often enough in the Office. Was it the strange free-masonry that always exists between people who are not me, on the subject of all connoisseurships—the same free-masonry that makes real men with high stiff collars talk cigars over my head—nay, over my prostrate body? It absolutely never occurred to Mr. McGaskin to offer me any this time, so completely was I outside the circle of Illuminati. To be sure, I anticipated him somewhat by saying I would go through into the shops, and did so, leaving him and my Father appreciating an aroma that I should not have known from any other nasty smell of spirits.

"I'll just have a word o' chat with Mr. Baxter, and then little Pips he'll see me safe round to 'Aydon's Lane and drive 'ome, and I'll cab to the Station. About an aitch girder they're keeping us waitin' for," added my Father by way of explanation to the gentleman he persisted in calling Mr. Baxter.

I left them sympathizing over Goods Stations and their sins The experience of both was that Goods Stations absorbed all consignments into their systems, never by any chance forwarding anything to its destination.

When after a day of wrangling with Pring, and altering drawings to arrive at a *modus vivendi,* I rejoined my Father in the evening, he produced the statement of account of the previous day, covered with corrections in red ink.

"Three pound six and four by corrections, and two-and-a-half per cent. for cash settlement," said he. "You mustn't allow Baxter to 'ector over you, Nipper! He's been charging you through the nose all along. You send him round to me—I'll square him up 'ansum!"

"I hope he's not offended," said I.

"Not he! Pass the cayenne."—My Father pronounced this word as if it consisted of two letters only.—"This blooming fish tastes like the napking—tastes of cold water. What's to offend him, Joey boy? It does 'em good to docket 'em down. You'll see he'll ask you to dinner—you'll see the daughter."

I took so little interest in the daughter of the ferret, that I didn't even enquire how my Father knew anything about her. The invitation to dinner came sure enough, and I respected my Father's acumen more than ever. Of course I accepted, with the addition, made when I saw Mr. McGaskin next morning, that if I came up to Circus Road, St. John's Wood, earlier, I should find tea and strawberries on the lawn and a geem of Crawky, if I cared for Crawky.

In the early sixties Croquet flourished—not with its first character of a blinding, maddening, absorbing, distracting, ruinous mania, perhaps—but still it flourished and was to me an acceptable diversion. So I appeared as bidden at the ferret's house, which he had christened Ronaldsay, and was shown through a long greenhouse passage with shrubs in tubs; and eluding the beak of a sulphur-crested Cockatoo upside down, arrived uninjured in the garden and was welcomed by a young lady with the most beautiful deep auburn hair I had ever seen, and a complexion like a Titian. My other-self young man felt like being *impressionné;* but I snubbed him abruptly, and felt keenly for poor Miss McGaskin, to whom I thought the contrast would really be painful. However, I reflected on what I was by this time beginning to learn, the attraction of contrasts, especially among girls. I was taken aback —only I hope I didn't show it—when she presented me to a lady, who came out from the drawing-room, as Mr. Joseph Vance, Mamma, and the lady said she saw I had already made acquaintance with Miss McGaskin. Different people, different ways!—However, she called her Jeannie when she spoke to her.

I suspected my Father at once. And my second self very nearly fell into the trap—in fact, in the course of an hour or so of Croquet he became quite restive. He was inclined to be jealous of Tom, Phil, and Mr. Mac-something whose name I did not catch, all of whom came in to play Croquet. I did not wonder at him, for really the brown-gold hair in the sun was too overwhelming; unconditional surrender was evidently the condition of the three other young fellows. But I had never felt the double personality so strong since the dreadful week of half-fever at Oxford. I am sorry I have no less cumbrous way of writing of it, as it has formed so great a part of my existence. I might certainly speak of myself as *I*, and the other young man as Joe Vance. Suppose I try that way, and see how it works.

I was so angry with Joe Vance, then, for his susceptibility to this beautiful Jeannie, and indeed so piqued with poor Jeannie herself for trying to plant her image in my secret garden where I cultivated Lossie's, that I collared Joe, and compelled him to talk to another girl who was playing, named Jane; who was, I thought, not the least likely to provoke any tender passions on anybody's part. I inventoried her in my mind as a really very nice girl that I could be friends with, and allow Joe Vance to play with, without fear of consequences. I told him distinctly that I was not going to tolerate any foolery. But more than once I caught his eye sneaking round under the attraction of the lovely vision, and had to call his attention to the rather high forehead and smooth brown hair and amiable hazel eyes of the really nice girl who could be recommended as innocuous to the single.

I wonder what these two girls would have really thought of me (or us), if they had known! What would Jeannie have felt for the Joe Vance who must needs presume to get in a flutter about her beauty almost before making acquaintance? Scarcely respect—probably *silly boy* would have been the verdict. And what would Jane have thought of *me* for deciding that no Joe Vance would fall in love with *her,* at any rate?

"Isn't she absolutely lovely?" said Jane, dropping her voice confidentially. I had been introduced to Jane, by Jeannie, who, forgetting my name at the moment, presented me as Mr., and her as Jane. She never mentioned her other name, as just at the moment her own hair got tangled in a wandering briar. Tom or Phil, being close by, offered rescue, and (as I thought on purpose) unsettled some tackle that restrained the masses of gold. Down came the hair, and Jane was in requisition to stick it up again. She succeeded—though it came down again two minutes after. But I didn't get Jane's name. The Croquet proceeded.

"Just look at her now, with her face in the shadow and the sun all through her hair. I declare she's croquet'd me to the end of the lawn! It's you next—you must get me back again, or I shall never be through my hoops."

"It isn't my turn next, it's——" And I didn't know the name of our partner, so I left him nameless.

"Mr. Macallister? Oh dear, there he goes! She's croquet'd him too." And so she had, and then she went through two hoops, taking her partners Tom and Phil with her, and put them both out, and then, missing the post herself, in a paroxysm of excitement brought all the beautiful hair down again, as aforesaid. And then she and Jane went in to do it up properly.

But a light had broken on me! Now I knew why Prior Anselm had mixed himself unbidden in the croquet—he had been doing so all along, and I was such an idiot that I had not found out the reason.

"You don't know me, old chap!" said I, and Bony Macallister withdrew his eyes from a first-floor bedroom looking-glass back, visible through an open window, and turned round to see if he did. The warmth of the greeting that followed was such as only two boys who had nearly killed each other in old days could have compassed.

"Why, you're intimate friends then," called out a soft Scotch accent from beyond the looking-glass, and I thought I heard Jane say sit quiet or it would all come undone again.

"Well, you see, we were once such intimate enemies!" said Bony. "Come down and I'll tell you all about it."

Whereupon Jeannie came down all curiosity, and Jane along with her. And the Homeric tale was told. And Jeannie said that we were all old friends then, and we needn't be stiff any longer, and called Mr. Macallister Archie and slipped her arm through his. And then naturally another light broke on me. It had this curious effect, that I had no further trouble with Joe Vance and his susceptibility to Jeannie's beauty. He was as undisguisedly glad as I was about her manifest relation to Bony Macallister. And Jeannie took upon herself to perceive that doubts had to be cleared up, and did it in this wise—

"Noo, Janie," she said, with the very slight Scotch accent—so slight that I won't try to render it in spelling. "You mustn't go telling Mr. Vance that Archie and I are engaged, because we're not."

"All right, Miss McGaskin," said I, "I won't believe Miss—Miss——"

"Spencer," said Jeannie.

"Spencer," said I, "if she does tell me. But I *am* so glad about it, old fellow." And I wrung his hand again, and Jeannie gave me hers to go on with. Then we went back to the lawn from which we had strayed into a bye-path—and found the two youths, Phil and Tom, having a game to themselves. They were cousins and evidently adored Jeannie, but not to the extent of loss of appetite or sleeplessness!

"And noo ye've foond your way to the hoose," said McGaskin père when he returned from his daily round of whiskey-sips and double entry, "ye'll ken it weel anither time. It's a wee bit oot 'o' the warld, but ye'll no find better air, and ye can get on Hampstead Heath in twenty minutes."

"It only took me a quarter of an hour to drive down," said Miss Spencer. But even then I didn't put two and two together. I was always a slow-coach at this sort of thing.

However, later in the evening I found myself sitting beside Miss Spencer on a thing like an S in the back drawing-room while Jeannie was singing at the piano in the front one.

"Of course," said she, "they are really engaged, whatever Jeannie chooses to say. I wonder Mr. McGaskin never mentioned it."

"He never said a word about it! Why should he?"

"How can you be so nonsensical, Mr. Vance? Only look at Jeannie! Do you suppose all men are adamant like you?"

"*I'm* not adamant," said I, with a guilty feeling about Joe Vance's recent attitude. "On the contrary, if Miss McGaskin had kept a book I should have put my name down. I consider her quite irresistible, and I'm so glad about my old schoolfellow."

"I wonder Mr. McGaskin never mentioned it. But perhaps he is right. I know he won't allow Jeannie to be really engaged, because, as he says, she's very young and ought to have a good look round before she settles."

My dear, good old Daddy! How vividly I could now picture to myself the rest of that interview with the canny Mr. McGaskin over their abominable nectar! How my Father had heard tell that Miss Jeannie McGaskin was a screamer, and hers had admitted that she was a comely lass aneuch, but had dwelt in Scotch on the anxiety lassies were to their parents. How my Father had then remarked that laddies, or their English equivalent, were the same sort o' turn out, but he hoped his would steady down to a profession, but it didn't do him any harm to look about a bit. And there were worse wild oats, as *we* knew, Mr. McGaskin (with his jocular roll), than making inventions. And after all, if he *did* spend a trifle it would all come off his own inheritance, and he had no brother or sister—and there would be plenty. And I felt, as I sat by Miss Spencer on the S-sofa, that one or both had then closed one eye to register worldly wisdom. And Jock o' Hazeldean came to an end in the next room, and got o'er the border and awa', and I heard Archie say, "Now Young Lochinvar," and Jeannie plead for respite. Then I recalled myself to Society and answered Miss Spencer.

"She evidently has settled, and she won't easily do better. I haven't seen him till now for eight—nine—how many years past?"

I tried to think. "Let me see! How long ago was it I went to stay for a fortnight at Bony's Governor's house in Perthshire? Why, I remembered telling Lossie I was going—of course I did!—

why, of course it was when we had that talk under the Pines on Hampst——"

I don't really think my thoughts carried me to the second syllable. I saw it now—I was sitting beside Sarita Spencer's sister, the little girl Janey. How I never came to see it before I can't imagine!

I was taken aback—but then it was the second surprise that day, and I was exhausted, so to speak! However, I didn't see the occasion for an accolade, this time. So I merely said, "Well, now—how very funny!" And Janey naturally asked what was very funny.

"Why, of course! You're Miss Sarita Spencer's sister Grizzle. I came up to your house to see Lossie Thorpe—years and years ago—don't you recollect? We played Pope Joan——"

Jane turned a puzzled gaze on my face, backing slightly on her half of the S to make it good manners to stare, then vibrated her hands with a sort of wait-a-minute action, then brought them up over her eyes to think in, and said, "Oh, stop, stop, stop! I shall have it directly.

"*Now* I know," said she, in due course, "I remember it all! You're Lossie Thorpe's schoolboy that was to wait till she came. In the Library——"

I remembered it all too. I remembered the hushed Library—the smell of the Books—the song of the bird—the little girl in the glass. And there she sate!

"Well, it is very funny, isn't it? Do tell me about your sister. You know about Loss—I mean Mrs. Desprez. She's in India."

"I ought to know about her! Why, Sarry was her bridesmaid, and I was to have been one—only I couldn't come back from Cheltenham. I thought it *such* a shame." I agreed,—and repeated my enquiry after Sarry.

"Oh, well—I *have* news to tell you there. Sarry's going to be married herself!"

I was just on the point of expressing intense surprise, when I luckily remembered manners, and began to say that I had expected to hear that long ago, and then remembered that that would never do either. Also I remembered Sarry had been a bridesmaid and I had not seen her—nor any other bridesmaid—nor any maid of any sort except the brides for that matter. I blundered my felicitations somehow, and sought particulars.

"She's going to Ceylon! Mrs. Farquharson she'll be. Mrs. Alison Farquharson. It will be so nice and near for Lossie Desprez."

"About a thousand miles from Calcutta!—quite handy in case of illness or anything——"

"What a shame to laugh at me so!" said Janey, rather ruefully. And I apologized, saying I thought she had been laughing herself. We then embarked on a good steady voyage through reminiscences. It's wonderful what discoveries people who really have no very large supply in common will contrive to make if they turn to and rake up the past. It is so enjoyable to do so, and we enjoyed it. . . .

"Well, you two have found plenty to talk about," said the musical voice of Jeannie, "and here's Mamma has hardly had a chance to make Mr. Vance's acquaintance. You'll have to come another time to see more of us. Some evening when Jane Spencer isn't here, Mr. Vance."

"Oh, very well, then! The sooner I go the better," said Jane, and fled for her "things."

"Ye'll feex anither day for Mr. Vance to deener when there are no young leddies," said Mr. McGaskin to his wife. And I thought his pleasantry vulgar, whereas I had thought that of his daughter graceful and charming. See the difference beauty makes!

Jeannie may not have been exactly under any binding arrangement to marry Bony Macallister, but they were left a much clearer field to say good-bye in than any others of the company had. Public leave-taking was in the Arcade of the cockatoo; and then Bony and I walked away down Circus Road in the moonlight—will you believe me?—with our arms over one another's shoulders, like schoolboys. "And how do you like my—*my* fancy girl?" said he, bursting out laughing. My answer was inconsecutive.

"Oh, Bony, dear fellow," said I, with a half-breaking voice, "she's married and gone away to India with her husband." And that was, so far as I can recollect, the nearest approach to confession about Lossie I had ever made to any human creature. You see, after pounding Bony nearly to a jelly on the subject, I felt concealment would be mere affectation.

I had some difficulty in making him understand why I didn't want to murder General Desprez. "I should, in your place," said he. "No—you wouldn't," said I. "You've no idea what a splendid fellow he is when you come to know him. He's the most glorious chap! Besides, it's no fault of his."

"I couldn't feel it so myself, Vance," said Bony. And Vance No. 2, in my inner citadel, who had quite given Jeannie up and was rather sorry he had been such an ass, murmured, "No more could I."

I believe a suspicion, on Bony's part, that it was cruel to parade his own happiness, had more to do with our parting as early as 2 A. M. than any desire of either to get home to bed. It was about then or a little later that we said good-bye on Waterloo Bridge, he going north, I south. His last communication referred to his Mother, who it seemed hated Jeannie, and who always blew up about his coming in late when she knew he had been at Circus Road. "Hope I shan't wake her up," said he. "Good-night, old fellow!"

I walked home in the moonlight, and thought as my latch-key turned in the door that *I* should not wake my Mother.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW JOE'S FATHER HAD BEEN MATCHMAKING, AND HOW HE EXCEEDED HIS ALLOWANCE. HOW GOOD A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WOULD BE FOR HIM. JOE IS NOT IN LOVE WITH THE FLAT JANE. HOW HE WROTE WHO SHE WAS TO LOSSIE; A FOOLISH LETTER. OF THE SPHERICAL ENGINE. HOW HE MET FLAT JANE AGAIN AT THE FERRET'S. AND GOT DANGEROUSLY CONFIDENTIAL.

I WAS very late next morning, naturally, and my Father was going round to the Works in a hurry, so I had no talk with him until the evening at dinner.

"You ain't tellin' me about the 'ansum gal, Nipper dear," said he. "You might tell your old Daddy somethin' about your goin's-on."

"How did you come to know about Miss McGaskin, Dad?" I asked.

"Let me see—how *did* I come to know about her? It must have been when I was talking to what's-his-name—at the Foundry—churchyard sort of a name."

"Paul?" I conjectured. And I think the guess did me credit.

"Right you are, Nipper! Well, it was his Aunt or Stepmother-in-law, old Goody Scratchett, was turnin' over young gals at ch'ice like for her nephew, and out she lets about a very engagin' young lass—a regular plummy one to make your mouth water. And it don't foller, says she, that a girl is pimply because her father is, nor yet one tooth a-stickin' out in front. And then young Churchyard he says of course everybody knows Jeannie McGaskin—but she's engaged! And the old Goody she says Walker, and engagements don't count——"

"Were they talking like that in Ratchett & Paul's office in business hours?" said I. "There can't be much doing there."

"Well—you see, the old cat happened in. And it was me set 'em all off by remarking that I didn't put much cash on any young man if he hadn't got a gurl. So we had it all round up and down. What's this here young beauty like to look at?"

I hope I did Jeannie justice. I tried to. And my Father murmured occasionally that was my sort!

"But she *is* engaged, Dad—and really engaged."

"Quite sure, Joey boy? She ain't married yet, anyhow! And gals are gals." My Father had got such a fixed idea (on no grounds whatever) of the desirability of Jeannie for his son, that it was cruel not to let him indulge it. But he remembered, when I told him, about Macallister, and the great turn-up, and appeared to consider that that altered the case. Nevertheless, he showed that his dear affectionate heart had built a little castle in the air for his son, in so short a time that he ought to have known as a professional man that it wouldn't stand after removing the scaffold. He seemed distinctly dejected, and exceeded his allowance of whiskey. But then I am sorry to say he often did this, and the limit laid down was a mere tribute to Temperance *en passant*. As in the case of crops that are always below the average, statistics had lost caste and gone mouldy. Still, I used to try to hold him to the fiction of an allowance. It had had its origin when Lossie's letter came from India in answer to mine, shortly after her departure. "Miss Lossie's quite right, Joey boy," said he. "We'll make it an allowance and stick to it." He called her Miss Lossie to the day of his death.

What was so painful about this whiskey bane, and my Father's constant effort to keep it under, was that at the end of every year he was visibly a very little worse than at the beginning, in spite of his having turned over a new leaf every six weeks or so. However trenchant and decisive these reformations were, it seemed to come to the same thing in the end. It reminded me of the dreadful year preceding my Mother's death, when, however many times her cough was better than yesterday, it was always a little worse than last month. And however much she gained flesh, she always grew thinner. I wondered in my heart at the influence Lossie had exercised—for from the day she wrote that letter about him to Sarita, till the champagne incident at her wedding, he had hardly sinned at all. And even now it was chiefly her influence by letter from India that produced these spasmodic reformations.

I communed with myself a good deal (I discussed it with Joe Vance, so to speak) whether if I were married it would not act as a check on this propensity of my Father. Was it not possible that the great strength of Lossie's influence lay in the fact of her being a woman, and was it certain another inferior woman (that is, another woman) would not do as well, or proportionately so? Joe Vance became a convert to this view, and pointed out to me that his trifling outbreak of susceptibility to Miss McGaskin showed at least that the question was still open. "Can't you look about you, you booby," said he, "for some girl who will do equally well for me?" And he proceeded to give specifications. I noticed that he stipulated for a head of auburn hair, item two eyes a shade green, item two rows perfect teeth, item two white arms with ditto hands, filbert nails on same, item several other items circa sixty-seven inches long all told. And I replied to him, "You vulgar-minded blockhead, can't you see that you are not including either a heart or a mind in your specification, and if this Mrs. V. of yours has either it will be a gross unfaith to go on nursing my memory of Lossie, making disparaging comparisons, treating her in short as just a convenient helpmeet—a sop to the mechanical demands of life. While if she has neither, what good will she be as a whiskey check?" "Well, then," said Joe, "can't you make a compromise? There are other sympathetic ties than those of the heart. Be content with a mind only, and only give a mind in return. Find a pleasant reasonable sensible companion—she and I shall get very fond of one another in time without being ever exactly in love; and she will exercise a most beneficent influence in the home circle, and all that sort of thing."

Had I known all I know now about men and women I should have replied: "Blasphemer! How dare you suggest a profanation of the sacred name of Love? Do you not know that none can tamper safely with a plant whose roots are in the very depths of Nature, whose branches may shoot up into the highest Heaven! Shut up, short-sighted idiot! Either be silent, or if you insist on boring me with the suggestions of your own inexperience, don't say what I know you have in contemplation, that I should do well to offer civility and friendship, coupled with the cares of a household and possible children, to that very nice and amiable and sensible girl whom you positively refused to kiss on any terms, when neither she nor I had asked you to do so."

However, I was very inexperienced myself, rather childish in some ways; so I let him run on, and he did in point of fact make me an offer of Jane Spencer then and there, taking for granted in the most impertinent way that she would be quite ready to order her trousseau.

"I say, Joe," said I, "you're not letting her have her voice in the matter."—"Are *you?*" said he.

I wasn't hypocrite enough to make out that I was quite unconcerned about meeting Jane Spencer again, but I wasn't altogether honest about it either. For I admitted that I shouldn't mind having another look at her on high public grounds, such as the possible benefit of my Father if I made a reasonable and prudent marriage, or the injustice of not letting her have another look at me if she wanted one. That she did so was an entirely gratuitous supposition on my part—merely the result of too much self-examination. I chose to shut my eyes tight to what may have been the real cause of there being any self-examination at all, the fact that when Jeannie broke up the S-sofa séance, I felt I could easily have borne another quarter of an hour. My vanity of course suggested that Jane also felt a little nipped in the bud. I think what the Chinese call the Feng-Shui of the sofa-back had a good deal to answer for. I have since then learned that if you want a young lady and gentleman not to think about each other, you will do well not to remark that both their names begin with the same letter, or that both their heads want brushing, or that both are standing on the same paving-stone. It is safer on the whole never to say *both* or *neither* to them. Now if an S-sofa could speak it would certainly say something beginning with one or other of these words. All the same, had I fallen out with Mr. McGaskin over the Spherical Engine, and never met Jane at his house again, I shouldn't have given her another thought. And if I had seen her death in the papers I shouldn't have felt called on to fret about it. Am I wrong in supposing that young men are very often ready to feel *navrés* when they hear of the engagement elsewhere of girls whose death would scarcely move them?

As it turned out, every day that passed made me less sensible of the advantages of a prudent marriage, and in about a week I had decided that I wouldn't examine myself any more until I heard from Lossie in answer to a long letter I wrote her asking her advice. It contained a full and true confession of all my alarms and excursions on first seeing Jeannie, on which I laid a great deal of stress in order that Lossie should not fidget about having made me unhappy—supposing that she ever did so. I finished with the interview with Jane Spencer. I really think that my broad and bold exaggeration gave as good a version of the facts as all the rhodomontade I have been inflicting on somebody unknown. "You've no idea," I wrote, "what an extremely beautiful girl Miss McG. turned out to be in spite of her papa! And *so* jolly! I was literally head over ears in love"—and then followed an account of my recognition of Bony, and then how "I had to give her up and wear the willow, and who do you suppose I consoled myself with? Why, Grizzle! ! ! We got stuck on a sofa, and talked all the evening. She's not half bad, considering!" I then went on, after more particulars of my recognition of Grizzle, to ask Lossie whether she thought it was really necessary to married happiness to be romantically in love at first go-off. I never saw that this was the last question I ought to have asked!

All letter-writing takes a very early answer for granted. If the writer were always stopping to think how long he would have to pause for a reply, there would be an end of all free intercourse by post. I wrote to Lossie and resolved to be guided by her advice. But it was over three months before her reply came. And in the meanwhile events travelled rapidly, second class. By this I mean that their journey was a sort of respectable middle-class business, not the triumphal progress of well-to-do occurrences such as belong to a perfectly whole-hearted courtship. How fast they travelled may be inferred from the fact that when Pheener brought Lossie's letter with others into the sitting-room at my Father's, she thought it considerate to knock. And indeed it was perfectly true that I withdrew to the other end of the sofa on which Jane Spencer and I were sitting, to call out "Come in!" If this were a real story for publication, this way of telling it would spoil it. But I am so ashamed of the confession I have to make, that I don't much care how I make it.

For, you see, I "got engaged" to Jane Spencer without really caring much about her. I cared *something* for her of course. I cared enough for her to be very much concerned about her future happiness; to swear to myself again and again that come what might no power should ever wring from me an admission of—of something about my own feelings towards poor Jane that I did not care to think aloud about. Besides, it would have been just the same about any other girl! Even if it had been Jeannie McGaskin, I added—And oh me! I never saw, in that word "even," the revelation it conveyed of the degree of my injustice to Jane Spencer.

After posting my letter to Lossie I fairly forgot all about Jeannie and Janey, all about my Father's whiskey peril, all about everything, in short, except the fascinations of the reciprocating movement that was just going to reciprocate, and the cumulative energy that was just going to be developed. As the Engine approached completion, Pring began casting about for a new Platform from which he might proclaim to the Universe the large share he had had in its inauguration, the care and watchfulness with which he had averted disaster during its construction, and the gracious influence he proposed to exercise on its maturity.

"I'm going to see this job safe through," said he. "Had my eye on it ever since we first got the idear, and I ain't the man to take it off now." He laid claim to having suggested a course of invention to my inexperience, and nourished originality in the soil of an infant mind which but for his care would have lain fallow.

The construction of the Spherical Engine may be said to have gone smoothly. It might have gone even smoother, if it had not been blocked by resolute opposition on Pring's part, and thwarted by his dexterous evasions. Tireless effort and unflinching singleness of purpose on my side were victorious in the end; and the nearest approach to a belief in his own fallibility was produced in Pring's mind, when the steam was put on, and, after a snort of doubt about its own efficacy, followed by an unwarrantable buoyancy, the great machine began to reciprocate, just at the moment when Pring uttered his last prediction of unqualified disaster. He showed himself a true disciple of Porky Owls at this point, for he retracted nothing, and showed a tendency to denounce success as merely a form of failure. "It's follerin' on what you might expect," said he, vaguely. "But it don't do to drore any conclusions on that. Results are what *we* go by." Pring thus reserved for himself an indefinite future, in which he might settle down comfortably and await the fulfilment of his prophecies.

The Engine became so violently excited owing to its not being yet fitted with a governor that it had to be stopped. Congratulations followed, subject to reserves, and then Mr. McGaskin asked the inventor to dinner. "And that ye maunna be dool, Mr. Vance," said he, "Jeannie shall ask a lassie for ye. I canna promise ye Miss Spencer. But there's aye a gude collection roond aboot, and she'll do ye justice." Could I in decency say less than that I hoped Miss Spencer would be achieved. I then concealed from myself the fact that I did so hope, lukewarmly, by remarking that she was quite an old friend. It brought a Platonic chill in, and I felt safer from misconception.

"I had *such* a fright, Mr. Vance," said Jeannie, whose accent I continue to fight shy of spelling—it was so very silvery and tender. "We thought we shouldn't get Janey Spencer! But I made Archie go up to Hampstead and tell her you were coming and come she must. There she is!" But it wasn't Janey. It was Archie back without her. He had left a note, in the hope that at any rate she would come after dinner.

Seven was dinner-time in the sixties; at Circus Road at least. And at half-past seven Mr. McGaskin thought it was time to stop waiting any longer. "Ye'll have to geeve her up, Jeannie," said he—and the family, Archie and myself, and two casuals all gave her up. Joe No. 2 accused me of being disappointed; and I denied it. But just as we prepared to go, wheels stopped at the gate and Jeannie said, "There now! there she is after all——" This was correct; and a pause was conceded, to allow of showing into the drawing-room and starting fair.

I had been a little afraid that Janey might prove dowdy on re-inspection, and felt distinctly better when, on coming into the room at the fag-end of a turmoil of recent haste, slightly flushed and explaining that she would have been earlier only she wasn't able to find her corals, she really did look quite nice—almost pretty. Joe Vance No. 2 expressed so much satisfaction at this, that I was fain to remind him that neither his opinion nor mine had been asked for.

"Is that Mr. Vance again?" said Janey. "I'm afraid we used up all our reminiscences last time. We shall have to talk about the Royal Academy."—In those days people used to do so, even after the Exhibition was over, as was the case now. For we had got well on towards Christmas.

Jeannie said she was sick and tired of Archie, and was going to have me for a change, and took me down to dinner accordingly. Archie took down the she-casual, and Miss Spencer our host. The he-casual and Mrs. McGaskin might have been forgotten and left upstairs, for any interest felt in either by the rest of the company. But they showed independence of character and came downstairs together on their own account.

As all hosts know but too well, four males and four females cannot sit alternately at table with the host and hostess at each end. As soon as, after the usual wrangle, we submitted to Jeannie sitting next to her mother and Archie next to the he-casual, I found myself between Jeannie and Janey and quite unable to see either without looking round. I made some remark about the great advantages a parrot would have in this respect. "Only he wouldn't be able to use his knife and fork," said Jeannie. And then that wicked young minx went on to improve the occasion.

"I tell you what would be a lot better," said she. "Have a long S-sofa and a table on each side. I mean a sofa like Janey and Mr. Vance's sofa upstairs."

"Oh, how kind you are, Jeannie dear," said Janey. "Do you hear that, Mr. Vance? That's *our* sofa—Jeannie's made us a present of it." I was very glad of the promptitude of this piece of intrepidity, as if a murmur of remonstrance from Mrs. Grundy had come off it would have been embarrassing. As it was, laughter prevented my catching the exact drift of some further chaff of Jeannie's, but it turned on there being another similar sofa upstairs with "the wiggle" the other way round. "You look a deal better on this side," said the incorrigible one, in an undertone across me. And if you work out the problem you will find that a true S-sofa shows its occupants' right-hand sides to each other, and that I was now on Janey's left. Of course I looked round, to confirm or contradict, and found Jane had no mark visible this way round. Instantly Jeannie pounced on me with "There, you see, Mr. Vance thinks so too!"

It's wonderful what latitude is allowed to a spoiled beauty. Nobody checked Miss McGaskin's flow of high spirits at the moment, though I think her Mother remonstrated afterwards. In fact, Bony told me some time later that Jeannie got an awful wigging about it, but defended herself on the score of *my* having introduced personality by my innocent remark about the Parrot. And, later still, revealed that Jeannie had admitted that her object had been "just to bring them together, and give them a start." She certainly was the most nefarious young woman I have ever known, before or since. Short of insulating Miss Spencer and myself, and pointing at us, she did everything that could be done to make us feel uncomfortable. The truth was her inartificial nature disqualified her for matchmaking. She was far too frank and direct. When you wish to develop a flirtation rapidly, you will do unwisely to segregate your two quarries from the rest of the company and then go a little way off yourself and count ten. This was apparently the school Jeannie had been brought up in, and she was a novice. In these matters delicacy is half the battle. The result was that there was a stiffness, and a tendency to mix in circles as far apart as possible.

But when circles are at most a room's length apart, stiffnesses are apt to die a natural death. This one came to an end owing to its subjects, victims, or proprietors (who were, I suppose, seeking other circles to mix in) happening across each other just behind the second S-sofa with the wiggle the other way. I caught Janey's eyes, and we both burst out laughing. The position was too ridiculous, and there was nothing for it but to try this one.

"You know we're to have whichever we like best, Mr. Vance," said my companion. Of course she was a good deal more self-possessed over this little incident than I was. "You mustn't mind Jeannie's chaff, Mr. Vance. After all, she's little more than a child—only eighteen when all's said and done!"

"I thought you were about the same age."

"Oh dear, no! years older. You can guess my age from Sarita's."

"I know. You're seven years younger than she is. You always were. So you're six years younger than Mrs. Desprez. You're exactly my age——"

"It's quite a coincidence. But then I was your age when you came to Hampstead all that long time ago, and I must have kept so all along."

"It was compulsory on both. I say, Miss Spencer!"

"What do you say, Mr. Vance?"

"I should like to come and see you in the Library again. It would be so funny! Just think what a long time it is!"

"Do come. Papa would be so glad to see you. Mr. Oliver Thorpe is in Papa's Office—you know, of course!—and we'll ask him to come too. I'll send you a note. Have you any particular days you are engaged?"

No, I hadn't. So that was all plain sailing. "And now," said Miss Spencer, "we can go and talk about the Academy. How flat you look, Mr. Vance! What's that for?"

Joe No. 2 muttered under his breath that this girl was a sharp girl. I told him I found her nice and bracing, and that I should take a leaf out of her book and say exactly what I thought. He might shut up.

"Because I don't want to talk about the Royal Academy. I want to go on where we left off."

"Where *did* we leave off? Oh, at exactly the same age!—Jeannie isn't there, is she?"

"Oh no! She's a mile off. Never mind Jeannie!"

"I wasn't thinking of that! However, of course she does twist things round to stuff and nonsense. No! I meant that I was old enough to be Jeannie's mother, nearly!"

"Another ten years would do it. Just about as long as from when I saw you in the Library at Hampstead——"

"It seems a lifetime—of course, it has been half of mine—and yours." I liked those hazel eyes when they looked grave over the lapse of time. "Shall we have another fifteen, I wonder?"

I wondered. Then Jane Spencer kept on looking grave, and I began to be afraid our conversation was going to spoil—they are sensitive things, conversations! But it didn't, for my companion suddenly brought together the dispersing rivulets of chat, and made them flow in a steady stream.

"Shall I tell you what I should like? Only you mustn't think my inquisitiveness——"

"Of course I won't! What is it?"

"I should like if you would tell me something about all those ten years."

Neither I nor Joe No. 2 could object to this, for we were both human, and liked talking about ourselves. So I told about St. Withold, and about Balliol, all in a very bald way, till I came to recent things, and then I found my narrative lingering for no particular reason over the reading party in Devonshire. "Isn't Lynmouth a very dangerous bathing coast?" said Miss Spencer. I replied that it was "not worse than others. One of us was nearly drowned though."—I forgot that I was nearly drowned myself as well as Master Joey. I saw the hazel eyes, which were very expressive (I began to notice), fixed on me with an added interest, which I misinterpreted.

"I know, Miss Spencer, you think I'm sticking over all this because I'm ashamed to tell you what a bad place I took in Honours——" She made no reply, but left her eyes considering me, while her fingers did and undid some clasp or buckle at her waist. I went on:

"Of course I was bound to do well in Science because that's my line, but in Classics I didn't come up to what was expected of me."

"You pulled him out of the water," said Janey, with sudden inconsecutiveness.

"Who? Little Joey. Oh yes! I was lucky and got hold of him. But we all dived. Carvalho dived three times. Who told you about that turn-out?"

"Why, his brother of course! He often comes to spend the evening at Hampstead. He said you were nearly drowned. I had forgotten it till you reminded me."

"And I had forgotten all about Nolly. Of course you know him quite well. I'm such a slow coach. But what was I saying? Oh, about the Degree! You know I was awfully cut up about it—because Loss—that's Mrs. Desprez, you know—had set her heart on my doing well."

"You and she have always been——"

"Yes. Since I was eight. But I don't know that brother and sister describes it. Because brothers are—brothers are——"

"I know, Mr. Vance, of course they are! I've no patience with brothers. But I never said brothers. What I was going to say was that her going away to India must have been a great blow to her friends."

"It was a great blow to me," said I.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by Mrs. McGaskin bringing me the he-casual for special communion. He had (I think) invented a corkscrew, and was certain I should be interested in it. I wanted to say "Devil take your corkscrew!" but only thought it. To the outside world I hope I appeared ready to cherish that corkscrew as the apple of my eye.

"I'll send you the note," said Jane Spencer.

But even as I execrated that corkscrew I was also inclined to quarrel with myself for not having patience to wait until Janey should ask me naturally to her father's, of her own accord. She would have done so, and would have remained perfectly cool and detached; quite free from any responsibility; while I, as I walked home from Ronaldsay, was feeling that I had made a plunge—had implied an initiative from which I could not in honour retreat.

If I had not had *any* attraction at all towards Janey I could have asked myself to Mr. Spencer's, and felt that nothing was involved. It was *because* I felt a certain lukewarm *entichement* (was it so lukewarm, though?—consider that corkscrew) that I regarded my action as a pledge. If I had understood girls better —been more of a man of the world, as the phrase is—I should have looked at the matter quite differently. Is no halfway house between an Egotist and a Man-about-Town possible to the unmarried mind?

I felt all the while that I was doing wrong, to Janey at any rate, perhaps to myself, in cultivating what I believed then would always be a half-hearted attachment, in order that the sacred cult of Lossie in my innermost heart should not be tampered with. If I could have believed that such a feeble seedling of a passion could strike root and spread and gradually oust all other vegetation, I should not have been so wrong. But the feeble seedling was to be allowed only a humble corner of the garden, in order that my great rose-tree in the centre should flourish undisturbed. And I had the hypocrisy to utilize my wishes for my Father's benefit, as a justification of what I knew must be a wrong to the person by whom that benefit was to be brought about.

I had no doubt that all I claimed of marriage would be provided, and I called it by a variety of plausible names—sympathetic companionship in all my aims and endeavours; friendship of a rare and choice nature not otherwise attainable; the constant solace of home life, community of interest, and so forth. But whether I talked to Joe Vance No. 2, or whether he talked to me, the word Love never came into our counsels. And I did not discern in my exasperation against the inventor of the corkscrew any sufficient grounds for a comparison between the feelings I was allowing to entangle me with an amiable and really very agreeable girl, and the impulse which had made the small new soul of a dozen years ago fall prostrate before the vision that burst upon it, and utter, if it spoke at all, the one word Yours, and accept its future in silence. For my verdict, if you please, about Janey Spencer as I walked home was that she was, no doubt, an amiable and very agreeable girl.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOE HEARS FROM FLAT JANE. HOW HIS FATHER SMELT A RAT. HOW JOE SPENT AN EVENING AT FLAT JANE'S FATHER'S, AND TOOK A BOOK TO HER LATER. OF THE OLD LIBRARY. JANE GETS AT JOE. BUT SHE IS VERY NICE. SHE CLEARS JOE'S MIND UP GREATLY. JOE IS A FOOL—WHY NOT BE FRIENDS? HE TALKS WITH DR. THORPE, WHO RATHER LOVES JANE BY REPORT. JOE PERHAPS LOVES HER TOO, AND IS A FOOL AGAIN.

Of course Nolly Thorpe was in the Office of Spencer, Aldridge, Aldridge, and Spencer, and nothing would have been more natural than for me to saunter in at Hampstead in his company. I certainly was very slow about social points, for I had completely forgotten the legal side of Nolly's life, and regarded him merely as a cricketer, dormant or active according to the season. If I had been a real Man of the World, I should have seen that the point was of no importance, and understood that Janey would attach no weight to a young man of my age asking to become a visitor to her family. I, who have always regarded the slightest implication of a pledge as my Act and Deed, took quite another view, and held that I had done something I was bound to "follow up."

What a tight fit Life would be if all its obligations were laid down by extremely conscientious young men!

The little note promised came in due course. It got burned later, but I can remember it word for word. Here it is:

"The Limes, Frognall, Hampstead,
"Nov. 18, 1863.

"Dear Mr. Vance: Would Tuesday suit you for dinner? Papa is only at home in the evening. Seven o'clock.

"I am afraid Sarry will be away all next week. She would have liked so much to see you again. She says she has always looked on you as a sort of brother of Mrs. Desprez—but she can't remember you anywhere except that once. With kind regards and hoping to see you on Tuesday, believe me,

"Yours sincerely,
"Jane Spencer."

"Wot's your love-letter this morning, Nipper?" said my Father as we sate at breakfast.

"Will I dine on Tuesday? See it if you like, Daddy! There's nothing you want me for on Tuesday?" And I passed the letter over to him. He was rather slow over reading, though he had improved immensely of late years.

"Jane Spencer," said he, taking the name first—"Widow lady, I presoom."

"Not a bit of it! Why should she be a widow?"

"Thought it looked the sort of name a Widow would have. Jane Spencer—Jane Spencer——" And my Father repeated the name as though he were trying it on a Widow and found it a good fit.

"She's a very nice girl about my own age. Who's this from, I wonder? Oh, it's Guppy Featherstonehaugh—in town till the fifteenth—can't I dine Tuesday? Hummums—go to Opera—Faust and Marguerite——"

"Who's she?" interjected my Father, but I took no notice.

"Little Tripey—engaged to be married—seems absurd!—No, I can't! not Tuesday—isn't the other one Tuesday?"

"The very nice girl your own age? She's Tuesday. But who's Marguerite?"

"She's nothing. She's in Faust. I'm sorry about Gup—but it can't be helped. We must get another day——"

"Won't the very nice girl do another day—not even for the Hoarperer?" I didn't rise to this, and my Father, after an ineffectual attempt to materialize Marguerite, gave her up, and went back to a starting point.

"Respecting of this here young Widow lady——"

"She's *not* a Widow," said I, emphatically.

"Well, Nipper dear, keep your hair on! Anyhow, you'd think from her name she would come in and do rooms out. Coorse *I* know Nothin'! I'm only a sooperannuated old Governor——"

"You're my dear old Dad. However, I'll tell you all about her." And I did so, and by the time I'd got to the fourth or fifth reason why I preferred to chuck the Opera and go to Hampstead, my Father was choosing Jane's wedding dress.

"Sorry she ain't a beauty, Joey! Look well in a sort of grey tool, perhaps? Does she wear mittens?"

I wasn't the least responsible for the image my Father was constructing of Jane Spencer.

"Not that I know of, Daddy. And she really is a very nice-looking girl, with hazel eyes and a much better figure than her sister. Of course she's not a Beauty, like that beastly little monkey Jeannie!" And then, as this epithet was certainly a strong one, I narrated Miss McGaskin's escapades of the other evening. I understood my Father to take exception to Jeannie's shovelling me off on a dowdy because she couldn't have me herself; this was quite an unjust summing-up of the position, and I protested that though Jeannie was awfully pretty, she was childish and a romp and a tomboy, while Janey Spencer wasn't a dowdy at all, if you came to that, and was particularly charming and attractive in other points than mere appearance. I liked the sound of my own voice when I praised her. I did not analyze my satisfaction. But reflecting that I might indulge it at the price of too much misconception on my Father's part, I discounted all this by alleging an entire absence of motive of any sort for preferring Hampstead to the Opera next Tuesday. My Father didn't seem impressed by these assurances, and said—Oh ah! he saw. I did not pursue the subject.

Nothing happened on that Tuesday visit to Hampstead, which duly came off as appointed, to make it the least necessary that I should carry Miss Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" up there two or three days later. Jane had certainly mentioned that she hadn't got the book and would like to read it again—but it could have waited a few days, or even gone by P. D. C. But I must needs travel up there in a snowstorm on the pretext of taking her a novel which the local Library could have supplied. The snowfall began as the bus passed the now extinct Waterworks in Hampstead Road. By the time I reached The Limes I was in a white world.

Only Miss Jane was visible—Miss Spencer was away. Mrs. Spencer was confined to her room; and as I forget what was the matter with her I suppose I didn't care. Mr. Spencer wasn't home yet, and might be very late. I affected perplexity, but ended by deciding that under the exceptional circumstances Miss Jane would do to represent the Family. The servant might have replied, "Considering that the other evening when you dined here you only spoke to Miss Jane and hardly looked at Miss Aldridge and Miss Kate Aldridge, who are both personable, I should rather think she *would* do." But she was a discreet servant, and merely asked if I would be pleased to walk into the Library. I felt that I should.

A canary-bird was in the Library, perhaps a descendant of the former one—but he wasn't singing. If I understood a twitter rightly, he made a remark about the snow outside, and then retired from public life. On the table was the same mirror; in the bookcase was "Peter Simple." I could have got it out and gone on reading about flapdoodle in the same armchair. But then, thought I, all would go on very nearly as before till the time came for Lossie's return; and then no knock would come at the door, and the house would not as then become suddenly all aglow with Lossie. I turned sick at heart, and forgot the years between. I turned a little physically dizzy too, for when Janey Spencer came in she found me sitting in the chair with my head in my hands and my elbows on the table.

She must have opened the door and looked in without my hearing her, for the first thing I did hear was her voice outside, speaking to the servant.

"Would you please come, Eliza! Come at once—I am afraid Mr. Vance is ill." I heard Eliza hurrying up the kitchen stairs as I ran to the door.

"Oh, my dear Miss Janey—do forgive me! I'm not ill at all, not the least—it's only a way I have of putting my face in my hands. And you came so quietly I didn't hear you." Of course it was a lie about putting my face in my hands—but it was a case of extreme pressure. I had to prevent Eliza thinking I was drunk—I wasn't afraid of Janey. However, I was so anxious for a perfectly clear conscience that as soon as Eliza had gone, I confessed up in that sense.

"*Something* was the matter though," said Janey, and nailed me to veracity with her candid hazel eye.

"Yes—something. But I don't know that I can exactly describe it. Something connected with my having been here so long ago."

"And Mrs. Desprez?"

What a very stupid boy I must have been at twenty-one to think this sharpness phenomenal! I got confused and stuttered.

"Yes—no—yes! Well, I suppose yes—in a certain sense, yes. Well then, *yes!*" This last yes was a hauling down of colours in reply to an anticipated broadside. For Jane had not spoken. Neither did she speak till she had stirred the fire and made a blaze. Then she closed the door, and after a collateral remark about how nobody ever came fussing into the Library and one could chat in quiet, sat down before the fire and brought up the Bill for a second Reading.

"I can remember Lossie Thorpe—that is, Mrs. Desprez—coming in here and sitting in this chair with her bonnet in her lap and her hair loose." So could I. "You were very fond of her?"

"Very. But she isn't dead, you know. Now, *is* she?"

"No! But she's—well!—she's married."

"And gone to India," said I, softening it, and evading the trend of the conversation. "It is almost the same thing as dead to us,—that is to her father, and her brothers and myself." But Janey was not to be put off with this mean shift. Her brothers, indeed! Not that she said this—she only thought it almost audibly. I felt it necessary to improve my position.

"You see, of course, it was like this. Lossie Thorpe took me up when I was the merest kid—used to sit on her lap and that sort of thing—and I used to spend most of my time when I wasn't at school at her father's. I almost became an inmate. And so, naturally, when we lost her, it was——" I stopped dead.

"Naturally it was," said Janey. "But I daresay her brothers are not inconsolable. Mr. Oliver Thorpe bears it with resignation. The young one, Joey, of course must feel the loss dreadfully—his sister was quite a mother to him——"

"Joey is young. Boys are like that."

"Like what?"

"Well—they take things coolly—sometimes——"

"And you have *not* taken things coolly?"

"Not altogether. Her father and I, don't you see, are——"

"No—I don't see——"

"By-the-bye, Miss Spencer, I brought you up that book—'Pride and Prejudice'—you said you would like to read it again. I think it far her cleverest Novel. I don't care nearly so much for 'Mansfield Park'——" Jane interrupted me.

"No—Mr. Vance—I won't be put off with 'Pride and Prejudice'—nor even 'Mansfield Park.' I want to know what her father and you-don't-you-see are?"

"Why, it's difficult! I mean it's a difficult sort of thing to talk about. It's not Euclid. Of course her going away wasn't the same thing to her father and to me—there could be no comparison——"

"And if she had stayed in England——?"

"It would have made the whole difference to him. Since she has been gone it has not been like the same house. He kept up wonderfully, and said he was not going to be a damper on his daughter's happiness. But as soon as she was gone he broke down. And he has never seemed the same since." It was curious what a relief I found it to turn the conversation in this way entirely to

Dr. Thorpe. All I said of him I was at liberty to mean about myself, only it was so infinitely easier to say it of him. But this way of treating the matter wasn't fair to Jane Spencer, who saw the subject being wheedled into another channel. However, she let me run on for a while, until I escaped altogether into a region of no interest. I think I made use of sleeplessness Dr. Thorpe had suffered from in the past six months as a stepping-stone to dyspepsia; an interesting subject, but not the one the candid hazel eyes had nailed me up to talk about.

"Mr. Vance," said their owner, "never mind light diets and little and often. I want you to tell me something!"

"I will—if I can." But I was frightened all the same.

"Why is it a man can never be, frankly and honestly, friends with a woman, and talk to her without reserve as he would to a man like himself?"

"Can't he?"

"No—he can't! At least you can't talk to me so. Oh yes—I know what any one would say! We've only met three times; two wiggly sofas, and one dinner up here. But then just think! *I* was the little girl Janey you saw in the glass, as you told me last week. And I found you there nine years ago waiting for Lossie Thorpe. And just now I found you again in the same place, and all so changed. And then you make reserves, and keep this back and keep that back; and I want to be so sorry for you, and you won't let me."

How nice it would have been to have a sister like this to go to—in my half-delirious time at Oxford, for instance! "A sister or cousin or middle-aged relative of some sort," murmured Joe Vance No. 2, and then added, "whom I shouldn't have any particular *tendresse* for." But I put him aside, feeling thoroughly ashamed of him. "Oh, do forgive me," I cried to Janey, "I won't humbug any more. Indeed, I'll tell you the whole truth. Only, as I said, it's not altogether easy to tell."

"You would find it much easier to tell if you knew how easy I should find it to understand—or any woman, for that matter. Why, I believe I could tell you the whole story without troubling you to say a word. You were and always have been, and are still, so fond of Lossie Thorpe that you cannot bear to lose her. Where is the difficulty of talking about it?"

"There is none—to you." And Janey's free speech and direct treatment of the subject came to me almost as a kind of revelation. Also it put me on such perfectly easy terms with her that when, as I was taking leave at the door and Mr. Spencer came struggling in through the thickening snow, and remarked that it would be quite *contra pacem Domini Regis* for me to think of going all the way to Clapham on such a night, I accepted the suggestion gratefully, and without mental complications, and Janey said I should sleep in "my old room."

Why did I not accept Janey's frank interpretation of the position? Why could I not see that her persistence in getting at the truth about Lossie was due to her wish to define the terms of her friendship with me, and to preclude philandering? She was just the sort of girl to be able to be friends with a man and no more, provided he would be content to reciprocate. But I must needs sneak in a sub-intent to the effect that the position might be reconsidered, and I really only made use of the treaty as a stepping-stone to its reconsideration. Poor Janey had squared it all up with me so truthfully and courageously. For how could better security have been given for good behaviour than the confession of an anchorage elsewhere? Surely I was to be relied on to keep my affections to myself. But in any case of this sort, however truthful may be a girl's wish to fraternize but not to marry, the man's restless vanity is sure to be at work suggesting that her version of her sentiments is probably untrue, and that it is really quite impossible she shouldn't care for him a little more than that!

So when (as may be imagined) it came to the foolish declaration, that should not then have been made, of a passion that I was not absolutely certain I felt, Janey threw out her hands with a sort of gesture of despair, and cried, "Oh, Mr. Vance, Mr. Vance, we were so jolly and now you've spoiled it all!" And so I had, and had done it very stupidly too. For a revelation of what I was pleased to call my feelings, which would have been plausible to myself, or maybe more than merely plausible, a year after my confession about Lossie, was a mistake at the end of a couple of months.

My Father, who had been watching my proceedings with deep interest, was rather disgusted when I told him the widow lady said she wouldn't have me. For he persisted in considering Janey as essentially a relict; although by miscarriage of circumstances she had never been married. He cheered up, however, when I gave him a few more particulars. "It's only her 'umbug, Joe," was his conclusion. "The land warn't ripe for building! You turned on the water before it biled, and just spoiled all the tea. I should 'ark back to the startin'-post if I was in your stockins, and light a new cigar, as the sayin' is." I did not identify the saying, but I saw that my Father's mixture of allegories contained the truth.

I had half informed Dr. Thorpe of all my goings-on, and had described my visit to the McGaskins and so forth. I noticed that whenever I went on my weekly Saturday evening visit to Poplar Villa, which had become a sacred usage, the Doctor's first greeting at the gate was always: "Well—Joe—any news?" And he expected some, anxiously—and his disappointment was always visible when there was no news. No doubt casual intimations reached him through Nolly, who was just capable of a very languid interest in a love-match when there was no Cricket-match on the tapis. I settled in my mind that I would take the Doctor into my confidence at the next opportunity. One came quickly enough, for when I walked into his Library the first time after what I had represented to my Father as my rejection (though, indeed, it hardly amounted to that) the Doctor met me with, "Come, Joe, some news this time, I hope!" I should have liked to be able to say yes, for he looked grey and old, and as if he sadly wanted a life-brightener. But I had to shake my head.

"Nothing, so far, Doctor."

"But something, some time—eh, Joe? You'll tell me when there is any news, dear boy, won't you?"

"Indeed I will. Or suppose I tell you now—Nolly has told about me and Janey Spencer—isn't it?"

"That's the ticket. You shall tell me about it all dinner-time. The Legal Mind and the Poet are both away and we shall have it all to ourselves." The Legal Mind, of course, was Nolly; and the Poet, Joey. He had certainly a faculty for verse-writing. But we have nothing to do with him at present.

"Now, Joe, old boy!" said Dr. Thorpe, when we came to the port wine and walnut stage—"tell me all about you and Jane Spencer."

"There isn't much to tell. It comes substantially to this—I have told Jane that I like her very much (which is perfectly true) and that I think she would be an ideal wife for any man, and that if she agrees I will try to make her an equally good husband——"

"Was that the way you put it?"

"Well—very nearly!"

"And what did *she* say?" I imitated Janey's action and manner in replying, giving her words as I have given them above.

"She must be a particularly nice girl," said the Doctor, his face rippling all over with amusement.

"Indeed she is," said I, and broke into a panegyric of Janey with real pleasure.

"And you really mean, Joe," said he, when I had done, "that you felt all that and couldn't put any more steam on than what I gather you did—from what you say?"

"I put on all the steam I was capable of."

"About two pounds to the inch?"

"More than that—say, twenty."

"What pressure is wanted to make your other Engine, the Great Invention, reciprocate?"

"It works best at high pressures."

"Ah, Joe dear, that's where it is! The Human engine works best at high pressures. Janey would reciprocate, I have no doubt, at two hundred to the inch. What does your Father say—you've told him?"

"Oh yes—I've told him. He goes on the same line—says I turned on the water before it boiled, and spoiled all the tea."

"His metaphor is better than mine. We seem to run into metaphors over this job! Of course the urn ought to spit and fizzle before you turn the handle down—also the pot ought to be warm! It's a pretty allegory. Now you'll have your smoke." And I sat and puffed before the fire.

But, as all roads lead to Rome, so for me in these days all roads led to Lossie, who was my Rome. Even the allegory of the urn and the tea brought back to me one of the thousand pictures of Lossie which line the walls of my gallery of Memories. I could see her plainly kissing Sarry on both sides; as I presumed, to keep her isosceles!—and could again hear the urn in the breakfast-room at The Limes protesting against being left boiling so long. Now if you skipped the place where I told of this you won't know what I mean. Skip this too—

"Cheer up, Joe! Don't look so sad, old man. The fly-wheel will keep the engine running till you put the steam on again. She'll be all right!"

"Janey Spencer? Oh yes—I daresay that may come all right—one mustn't be in too great a hurry."

But the Doctor looked unhappy and disconcerted as he stood there on the hearthrug rubbing his chin. Then he made a turn up and down the room, stopping to take snuff. Then he came back and let himself down into his armchair again with "Ah—well!" Each of us knew what the other was thinking of.

"Leave it all in God's hands, Joey," said he. And we left it—left it alone, at any rate, until the servant having provided a tray and a kettle and lemons *ed altri generi,* as Italian shops say, wanted to know if there was anything else. Being informed that with that exception (whatever it was) the Universe was empty, and there *was* nothing else, she retired with benedictions. Then I returned to the subject.

"But the question is, is it right?"

"Is what right?"

"Going hammering on at Janey Spencer, when she's said flatly that she would much rather not think of marriage at all, that she does not believe that she would be happy nor make me happy, and that for all that she doesn't want to lose me—says why can't she have me without marrying me?"

"That sounds like an Advanced American idea! But of course I know what the girl means—bless her heart!"

"Of course. Well, *is* it right?"

"The question is—are we really fond enough of Janey Spencer? Well—are we?"

I couldn't answer. I felt that Joe Vance No. 2 was trying to get *his* word in, but I snubbed him, as I did not approve of his tone of thought on the subject. The Doctor continued:

"It does seem to me *very* odd, Joe, that any young man should speak as you do of a girl and not be able to marry her; twice over, for that matter."

I broke into a perfectly genuine laugh. "Marry Jane Spencer!" I cried; "why, I'd marry her to-morrow! Any fellow would."

"Then what's the botheration?" said the Doctor, looking amused again. I felt I must clinch my meaning.

"I know she will never marry me unless I can give her some satisfactory assurance that I—well! some kind of satisfactory credentials——"

"Perhaps," answered he, very gravely, "if you were to tell her all about yourself—all, I mean, about things of this sort—how would that be?"

"I have told her everything," said I.

Dr. Thorpe's puzzled look came back again worse than before. He took more snuff, and in the sound of his taking it I almost thought I heard a kind of a sob. Then he said again, "Ah—well!" and after a pause, "You must leave it all in God's hands, Joe." He got up and took another turn about the room, and then resumed his chair and his speech at the same time.

"When I say that, Joe, you know what I mean. We can't take anything out of God's hands—not the biggest among us. But we can all do our best in patience, and be ready to accept the end when it comes. That's my meaning, or most of it."

"You were afraid I should get into a Capstickian Complicated Mixture over it?" said I. For really, it seemed to me we were on the edge of a Metaphysical morass.

"That sort of thing certainly!" said he. And we both laughed, with a little tribute to old times, somehow, in our laugh. "But I don't see the use of Anthropomorphism at all, unless it stands by us at a crisis! However, if I can't get a gleam, I shall just be patient in the dark. But it would have been very nice, dear boy, to know that you were happy—No! I wasn't building on it. And you mustn't allow a wish to make my mind easy influence you. It would be wrong to Miss Spencer. If you try again, after what she has said, she will probably believe what you say—which she evidently didn't, last try!—Joe!"—My name came from the Doctor by itself, in serious appeal. He laid his forefinger on my hand, that held my empty pipe on the table beside me. "Yes—Doctor!" said I.

"Are you quite sure you know how much you care about her?"

"I'm sure I could——"

"Marry her? Yes—of course! But, I mean, are you sure you don't care more than you think?"

"No," said I, after a moment's reflection. "I'm not." And I wasn't. And I tried again, and Janey believed what I said. So did I.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW TWO FIANCÉS READ MRS. LUCILLA DESPREZ'S ANSWER TO JOE'S LETTER. OF PERTURBATION THEREAT. OF HOW JOE'S FATHER FOUND AND READ IT TOO. HE WILL NOT BE AN ENCUMBRANCE. OF ANOTHER LETTER FROM JANE. JOE IS BROKEN QUITE OFF.

WHEN, therefore, Pheener knocked at the door of the sitting-room at my Father's (as per my disjointed statement some chapters ago) it was an Engaged Couple that called out "Come in," after establishing a respectable distance between its moieties. And Pheener came in and brought many letters, on one of which I pounced. I had reasons for wishing to read it before I showed it to Janey. But Janey was too sharp.

"Oh, Joseph—that's not fair! After reading all *my* letters the other day, and me letting you! I know who it's from—it's Lossie Desprez. However, keep it—keep it, I shall see all her letters to Sarry, and it will do just as well. So go your own way, Master Joseph."

The exact reason why Janey was at Clapham is not indispensable, but I may as well give it. She had been to pay a Christmas visit to an Aunt at Streatham, and I had been all day at work on Engineering Drawings in a little sanctum I had made for myself at my Father's. This Aunt was peculiar. She objected to nieces being engaged, and after much discussion it had been decided that it would be on the whole safer not to take me to see her. "She'll be all right when we're married, Joseph," said Janey.

Can any one explain why it is that Aunts have always to be treated with such tact and discretion? It is certainly my own experience that the Human Race appears to be always taking care not to give offence to its Aunts, and avoiding subjects which are likely to hurt the feelings of its Aunts, and wondering what Aunt This will say when she hears of That, or Aunt That will think when she sees T'other—and generally entrenching itself against serried ranks of Aunts, paternal and maternal. Is not each man's Mother some other man's Aunt? and many men's Aunts (however painful the fact may be) several other persons' Mothers? I should like to pursue this curious subject some other time—at present I have to get on with my narrative.

This particular Aunt of Janey's then, being bristly, and difficult of approach by half-fledged nephews, had thrown obstacles in the way of my calling for Janey to take her back to Hampstead, but at the same time had been keenly alive to the perils of the wilds of suburbs, and had graciously provided the carriage to give her a lift to my Father's. We were teaing together greatly to our satisfaction when Pheener knocked. And that brings me back to the letter again.

"No, dear girl—you shall have the letter all to yourself and read it first if you like."

"I was only joking, dear Joseph. Be a good boy and come back here and we'll read it together." And I have no doubt if you could have looked in at the window you would have remarked that we were a nice-looking young couple of spooneys on a settee reading a letter.

As our last letters had contained plenty to answer there was not much about India. There was a good deal about my Father, and I was a little sorry Janey should see it. Then I saw, glancing ahead of our deciphering, that the letter went on to answer my question about being "romantically in love." I was apprehensive that something might easily grate on the existing order of things, which had all come about since my letter was written. I established a firmer hold on Janey's loose hand, to provide against contingencies. On went the letter:

"Hugh and I were so amused with your visit to the Scotch Engineer's. Can't your friend Bony be induced to give up the lovely Jeannie? You seem to have been in a very serious plight about her. But fancy you happening on the other Jane at the same house. The idea of its being Grizzle all the while, and your not knowing it! But 'not half bad, considering'! Let me tell you, you are a most impertinent young man, and Janey is quite one of the most charming and delightful creatures I know——"

"Very well, Master Joseph," said Janey, sternly, withdrawing her hand from mine. "You shan't have it back again—you don't deserve it! 'Not half bad, considering!' Well, I like that! And then you have the impudence to ask me to marry you—after saying I wasn't half bad, considering!"

"Please, it wasn't me," said I. "Please, it was a clerical error. Please, it was a *lapsus calami*."

"Yes, that's all very fine! But considering *what?* That's what I want to know! Now *do* you deserve it back?—'Of course not.'

—Well I'm glad you plead guilty! Now leave alone and let me get on with the letter."

"And now, dear Joe, you ask me whether it is 'really necessary to married happiness to be romantically in love at first go off.' Do try and think of what I write as if I were speaking to you, and speaking very seriously. My idea is this: that happiness *may* result from any marriage however incongruous, and however little the parties deserve it! But no one has a right to run any risks. Another human creature's happiness is too serious to tamper with, even if you have a right (and I don't believe it) to make ducks and drakes of your own. If what you say points to an intention to apply for Grizzle, and means that you don't feel quite sure you care about her, *wait till you do!* You are only a boy of twenty-two—what do you want with marrying! Go to the Zoological Gardens with Grizzle—go to the Play—go to Henley-on-Thames—go anywhere, but don't go to the altar of Hymen. When I think of what a dear boy you are and what a dear girl Grizzle is, I shudder at the idea of your imperilling each other's happiness by rushing into a stupid undertaking, with possibly horrible consequences. Why can't you be contented as you are?"

"Why can't you?" said Janey, stopping short and turning the letter over on her knees.

"Never mind—I can't. That's enough for now. Business is business. Go on with the letter!"

"Yes—but I want to know why you can't."

"Why I can't what?"

"Be contented as you are——"

"I *am* contented. I've got you here, and what more do I want?"

"Joseph! Be good enough not to prevaricate." But there was a certain tone of satisfaction in her voice, and I felt that I had made a hit.

But why do I put it in that way? Why should there have been any question of scoring?

"Cut along, Grizzle darling! Fire away with the letter."

"Now, my dear old boy, I don't think I should write so earnestly about it, only that I suspect from other things you say that you have another motive in wanting to marry. You always let cats out of bags when you write letters, although you do know how to keep your mouth shut in——"

"—What's that word?"

"'In Nature.' That man that painted Vi, you know, said the mouth was small 'in Nature'——"

"—'in Nature,' and I can't help thinking you have got an idea that a daughter-in-law and a household would be good for your Father, and would keep him from the Whiskey-bottle——"

"Grizzle dearest—Lossie has quite misunderstood something I said. Oh, do—oh, don't—I mean don't go on reading, because Lossie can't have meant any one but me to read it——"

Janey folded up the letter and sat turning it over with the free hand. The other lay very limp in mine—and she said not a word.

"Oh, my dearest—don't you misunderstand me too!—I know quite well what gave Lossie that notion—it was in a letter I wrote before—you know I began sending off letters soon after she went. It was before ever we met at Circus Road—indeed, it was!" But Janey only turned the letter over, and her hand was very cold in mine.

"Never mind, dear Joseph," said she at last. "It was right and good of you to think about your Father. But——"

But Janey's lips clenched and her face wrinkled up as though a burst of tears were coming. It stopped in an early stage before reaching the sob or gasp, and only spoiled her face for a second or so. "Never mind," said she, courageously. "We must be off—we shall never get to Hampstead in time for dinner." Janey's face wasn't at its best when she began to cry, and I was glad when she cleared up.

She did not quite clear up though—there was a chill all the way to Hampstead, a something uncomfortable. She was sweet and nice, as she always was; but warmth and comfort had gone. I could see that Mr. Spencer's legal acumen perceived that something was wrong, but his professional reserve forbade his asking questions. As for Mrs. Spencer, I don't know whether she ever perceived anything at all on this or any other subject. Besides, there were guests.

I did not stay the night, as my room was bespoken by a country cousin. I found my way back through a gale and sleet to Clapham about two in the morning, and went to bed discouraged.

I had arranged to stay at home next evening and dine with my Father. I had been neglecting the old boy lately, and whenever I did this I fancy he took a little extra, to balance. He seemed to me peevish and sleepy. He made an unusual parade of allowancing himself two small glasses of whiskey, and even directed Pheener to take away the dam bottle.

"If I do go the length of another 'arf-a-glass," said he, "it 'll be quite independent of this here allowance—acrost another bar as you might say, hay, Nipper?" This was his favourite method of combining a clear conscience with the profits of transgression, and the smile under Pheener's skin came through to the surface.

"What's little Clementina a-grinnin' at?" said he.

At this the smile became a giggle or splutter, and vanished into the passage with Pheener and a tray. Provided with more cheerfulness of tone by this little incident, my Father went on:

"But you haven't any call to fret, dear Nipper. Your old Dad isn't going to be a burden on two young folk starting in life. *You'll* be all right."

"Daddy!"

"Nipper! Just precisely *as* I say, so I stick to! You and this here nice young lady, Mrs. Nipper as is to be, are going to start fair without encumbrances. You'll have to provide your own encumbrances," here came in a trace of jocularity, which expanded as my Father proceeded to rough-sketch an advertisement, announcing the arrival of an early grandson.

"But, Daddy, it would spoil it *all*, if you were not there."

"Would it, Joey? But I expect Miss Lossie's right. She mostly is. She's right about the dam bottle, and I expect she's right about you." He put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, which had served two purposes, one to give a finishing touch to solvency and respectability, the other to nourish a fiction that the wearer had always had a turn for reading, but had been baffled by short sight. He then pulled out a massive pocketbook, in which he had actually learned to write very fair memoranda, and drew from a side slip a letter which I at once identified as Lossie's letter of yesterday! I had looked for it when I returned, there being a remainder unread, and had been upset at not finding it, but had thought possibly Janey had taken it, and forgotten to give it back. Here was a nice mess!

"Well—I declare—Dad! There's my letter, after all! I hunted for it all last night."

"Nippers shouldn't leave their letters about. When they do, their Dads finds 'em and reads 'em. When they reads 'em their conclusions are (push over the 'baccy to my side)—as follows."—This resource of rhetoric favoured the lighting of a pipe before continuing.—"Are as follows—you shut up, Joey, and let me do the poll-parrotting—are as follows: When Nippers' Dads are addicted to anything (whiskey, for instance) it don't do 'em any harm to be well blown up—especially if Miss Lossie. So I say nothing about that. But I do say this, Joey," and my Father's manner changed as he forsook the *obliqua oratio,* "I do say a young gal's entitled to be consulted and have her finger in the pie, and not to have her boozy old father-in-law chucked round her neck like a millstone from behind."

"I know what you mean, Daddy dear! But though I have never said anything to Janey about it, I told Mr. Spencer what you said about there being enough and more than enough, even if I didn't succeed in my profession, and that you said there would be always this house, anyhow—of course he understood you wouldn't be turned into the street——"

"How do you know that, Nipper? Didn't the Prodigal Son heave his Grandfather out of a fourth story, or something? Maybe I've got it wrong—or the Reverend Capstick had? But it all comes round to the same thing in the end. Instead of offering your 'and and 'art to Miss Janey, you should have said, 'I am your devoted lover. Will you come (after Church, of course) and live with me and my sickenin' old guv'nor, and lock up the whiskey-bottle when he's visibly had too much?'"

"Oh, Dad, Dad, Dad, dear old Dad—I believe you're laughing all the while! Why, one of the very first things Janey said to me was that I never could leave my Father. There now!"

"On which account matrimony be blowed! That was what Miss Janey hadn't quite the 'art to say, or she'd have said it, 'cos she meant it. But it's all right, Nipper dear! As I said afore, sootes of Chambers are sootes of Chambers—or if not, there's any number of eligible residences within a radius. There's the Post."

Whenever the Post is heard conversation suspends itself naturally, until the said Post, or what it has unburdened its conscience of, is brought in. Weakness and Impatience sometimes run out to meet it, and sometimes come back crestfallen on finding it was only for the cook; or a circular. In this case, during the pause, I picked up Lossie's letter, and read the remainder.

"—would be good for your Father, and would keep him from the Whiskey-bottle. Dear Joe, I know how hard it must seem to you to place any feeling above your love for your Father, for I know how you love him. But ask yourself what you owe to the woman who gives herself and her life away to you without reserve—think of the risks she runs for your sake—think how her whole future depends on it. According to my idea the slightest taint of bargain-making on the part of either is *wrong* even when prompted by love for a parent. Such a motive, of course, is better than property-mongering—it is without the vulgarities of hard cash and titledom—but it's wrong in principle and fact, and *nothing can make it right.* Remember, I write all this wondering how on earth, if you love Janey at all, you *can* stop short of loving her outright. It must be like trying to stop running down a steep hill. . . .

"I could go on writing ever so long about it, but one must draw a line. Do think of what I say. I know you will be a dear boy anyhow, even if you do get a bit puzzled.—Only space on the paper for Hugh's love with mine.

"Your affect.

"Lossie."

"Two letters for you," said my Father, analyzing the Post. "Four for me. One for 'Ickman. One for Clementina—here's your young man wrote round to say he's got another gurl and don't want you. Catch it! Yours looks like Miss Spencer's 'and. You catch *it!*"—and my Father threw the letter across the table to me.

"Hullo!" said I. "Why, I saw her at eleven o'clock last night." I opened the letter in trepidation, feeling things had gone wrong. The first two words made me think I must be mistaken, and then reading on I saw I wasn't.

"Dearest Joseph: I feel I ought to lose no time in telling you the conclusion I have come to about our engagement. No marriage ought to take place when either party doubts its being for the happiness of both. Are you confident of yours and mine? I am confident of neither. It seems to me that we have been mistaken, and that all we can do now is to let bygones be bygones. I cannot tell you how I blame myself—for I feel I am the one to blame—nor how humbly I ask your forgiveness.

"Do not suppose that it is only Mrs. Desprez's letter that has done this—least of all that I should be hurt by thinking that your affection for your Father, and your wish to add to his comforts, had had an influence over you. I should only love you the better for your love of him. But it is impossible for me to write exactly the reasons why I feel I am right in breaking faith with you and refusing to become your wife. I am not sure that I really know them myself. I do know that I am acting with a thought for your welfare, as well as mine.

"I will not justify myself lest you should answer me with arguments, and persuade me to marry you against my own conviction of what is best for us both. Do not come to see me. Although I am forced to behave in this way, I hope and pray that you will always think of me as your most affectionate friend,

"JANE SPENCER."

"Anything disagreed, Joey?" said my Father, looking up from a letter he was anticipating Hickman over, with occasional grunts. "Got the stummick-ache? Have a little drop of the Objectionable? Put that dam bottle back on the table, Celestina."

"Oh no! It's all right—at least it will be all right. It's nothing." On which my Father, after looking attentively at me for a few seconds, poured out a glass from the recovered bottle. I took it, partly with a vain idea of preventing his drinking it himself; whereupon he poured himself out another, and what I took of mine certainly did me no good—it never did.

I wanted very much to conceal things from him; at any rate until I had seen Janey. But it was no use, for next day came another letter manifestly directed by Janey; and it was impossible to hide the facts, as it came by registered post and my Father signed for it. It contained the engagement ring I had given Janey, enclosed in a paper on which was written "With the love of a dear Friend." Nothing else.

I did not feel on the receipt of this letter anything resembling what I had felt when Dr. Thorpe told me Lossie was engaged. I absolutely retained self-command, and was more piqued and angry than anything else; but more with myself than with Janey. It was Joe No. 2 who perceived that Janey was not the only single girl in creation, and that there were more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. I resented this piece of irritability though I forgave Joe No. 2 for expressing his feelings on the ground of his having been taken by surprise. I found this quite consistent with loving Janey more than ever, and even allowing that she was perfectly right. I refused to myself to give up seeing her again with a view to her conversion.

I did succeed in doing so after importunity. But poor Janey, though she went as white as a sheet, refused concession. And when I broke into a final appeal in which I exhausted all my powers of persuasion, she gave way to a flood of tears and cried out, "Oh, Mr. Vance, Mr. Vance, you have no right to press me so—you have no right." And then hearing her Father's footstep outside at this moment she called to him. "Papa—Papa! Do come in and help me!" and in reply to his "What is it, dear?—tell me what's the matter," threw herself into his arms and between her sobs said, "Help me to tell him I *cannot* marry him, and *make* him believe it."

"If ever Janey changes," said Mr. Spencer, "or seems to, I will let you know. But she seems to me quite in earnest. My poor boy," added he kindly, "I can't tell you how sorry I am about it all. I think we had better say good-bye now."

And I walked home all the way from Hampstead to Clapham—in fact, I went a long way round quite needlessly. And all through that long walk my mind went on concocting and reciting the account of all these things that I meant to write out by the next mail—to Lossie!

CHAPTER XXX

JOE COULD BEAR TO LOSE JANEY. OF THE SPHERICAL ENGINE AND HIS NEW PROVISIONAL. AND PRING. HOW JOE'S FATHER WILL BUILD HIM AN ENGINEERING WORKSHOP. THE MACALLISTER REPEATER, AND JOE'S PARTNERSHIP WITH BONY. MRS. BONY'S BABY. MR. BONY ON ENGAGEMENTS, AND HOW HE DID IT. OF A CONFESSION OF PHEENER'S. AND HOW OLD VANCE GOT VERY DRUNK. EHEU! JOE GOES TO SEEK SOLACE FROM DR. THORPE.

I FELT dreadfully—dreadfully—ashamed of myself in the days that followed. I began slowly to see that I had really never considered Janey at all, all through! I was still too young to know that my fellow-vermin very rarely show any consideration whatever for their females under like circumstances.

It was very odd that I had gone on for so many years considering Lossie everything, and my Self only a casual Planetoid or Satellite of no importance; and here in a little three months, I had mustered the presumption to ask Janey Spencer for what I should hardly have dared to think of asking of Lossie. For indeed, Janey's own description of my attitude of mind about Lossie was the true one; I simply "could not bear" to lose her. Now, I found it very hard, at first, to lose Janey—but still, I could bear it.

I speculated on these points until I became quite alive to the fact that Janey was getting dim. Just as when one leaves behind the lights of another ship that for the moment have obscured the lighthouse that saw us out of port, just so Janey died away and Lossie's illumination beamed out steadily into the darkness. Memories of Lossie came back to me and found me a sadder and a wiser man.

However, I consoled myself with the Spherical Engine, and writing letters to Lossie. By the time my Provisional had expired, and I had to render a complete specification to go with the application for a full Patent, I had added many improvements, and it was necessary to make an application for each of them separately or for all together, but under no circumstances could they be included as a portion of the original invention in the Patent. I was, however, at liberty to make a new Provisional

Application for the whole thing. There was a disadvantage. If any one else had by accident himself invented my machine during the Provisional period and registered it, *his* Provisional would be held to have antedated mine, and I should lose everything. I decided to run the risk involved.

I got by this procedure nine months clear to incorporate my fresh developments. According to Pring, these were all his own suggestion, and indeed I must say he showed an alacrity in claiming paternity that was almost as good as the real thing.

"Just my idear!" was his invariable remark whenever I announced any new and important variation. "Wot I've been saying all along." And I am certain that Pring was honestly unable to distinguish between the reception of a new idea and the revival of an old one. He was like the boy Socrates converted to a belief in his own pre-knowledge of Geometry.

Not that he adhered to his claims of paternity when the birth turned out an abortive one. He then asked what did he tell me all along? And hadn't he said there was sure to be a back-lash? And it wasn't his fault if after all we got 'ung up by overheating in that bearing. He'd made himself 'oarse talking about it,—and so forth. But the net outcome of it all was that the Engine made progress.

What did not make progress was my selection of a profession. The obvious thing would have been for me to become a partner in my Father's business. But I was very lukewarm about this, and he positively objected to it. "The Nipper would spoil it all," said he, "with his ideas and notions." He looked upon invention and origination as likely to be fatal to the construction of buildings. According to him any builder who tried anything uncommon was already due in bankruptcy. "Becos, see what happens if you so much as ask a carpenter to put in an extra brad. You're a thousand pounds outside your contract that minute, afore ever you know where you are. In buildin' never you let any man do any job he hasn't done before—he'll make a 'ash of it! Any man presoomin' to do anything for the first time in his life ought to go before the Beak and be bound over." And of course my Father thought my ideas and notions would foster such presumption. In reply to my remonstrance that there must be a first time to everything, he merely remarked, "On another Job"—and seemed satisfied with his position.

One evening when my father and I were sitting with Dr. Thorpe, after dining at Poplar Villa, the latter spoke plainly out about his own views on the subject of my profession. "Why can't you go in, in earnest, Joe, for the thing you're always dabbling in, and spending your Father's money on? Take up Engineering and hammer away at it like mad."

"Well—of course that's what I should like to do. Only I thought a Profession ought to be a Bore—not a Pleasure."

"Greatest mistake in the world, Joe."

"Then there's another difficulty, Doctor—I can't get any one to teach me anything."

"Can't they teach you anything at McGaskin and Flack's?"

"McGaskin and Flack's," I echoed with tremendous scorn—"why, they know nothing themselves. I have to tell them *everything,* and then they do it wrong." I proceeded to give a sketch of this Firm, to which I ascribed abnormal ignorance and very inferior plant. I had been in collision with Pring that morning on the subject of screwing lathes: on whom I had discharged all the knowledge I had lately got from a paper read before the Institute by a very advanced German, who, if I remember rightly, could make a screw that only travelled one way, rendering lock-nuts things of the past.

"Couldn't you find him out and get him to take a pupil?" said the Doctor. "Howsomever, Joe, if nobody can teach you anything until he knows how to make a screw like that, you must be pretty well informed. Now, why can't you do this way? Most likely there's some corner at the works your Father could spare room in——"

My Father was adjusting a bandana handkerchief over his head to go to sleep under. "There isn't," said he, "elbow-room for a one-armed man to blow his nose in at present." Dr. Thorpe looked thwarted. "But I might make an 'andy shop for you," went on my Father, "by jackin' up the roof on the main buildin', and addin' a story. There wouldn't be any great trouble go with that." Dr. Thorpe looked greatly relieved, and my Father drew the bandana over his head and went balmily to sleep.

"There, you see, Joe! And your Father was saying he'd got more Power than he could use. So you would have nothing to do but find a clever foreman, who would understand about paying wages."

"I could pay wages."

"You can do Differential Calculus, Joe, I've no doubt. But don't run away with the idea that you can pay men wages. It's the last acquisition of human experience." And my Father murmured in his sleep, "Never you do anything yourself."

The foregoing fragment of after-dinner chat at the Doctor's sketches out very nearly what did happen. In fact, my Father provided me with all the means of starting Mechanical Engineering on my own account, and though I spent a great deal of money on inventions, still with my Father's shrewdness to back me I was able to make a fair show of covering the outlay and even clearing a small profit. But these were merely inventions-by-the-way, as they may be called. They belonged to a contemptible class of contrivances, and their objects were to sift and grind, to produce cleanness and comfort, or to save needless labour. A new device was on the road having a nobler object, that of destroying human life at a small expense and a great distance. This was the source of a good deal of emolument, and the development of it to the highest degree of perfection that any Repeating Rifle had then attained gave the keenest pleasure to its joint Inventors, neither of whom was capable of murder, though each felt satisfaction at the existence of foreigners as *raisons-d'être* for arms of precision, without whom we should have had to resort to Civil War, a shocking expedient.

Did I mention that Bony Macallister was also in the Engineering line, or was I too busy with other matters when I wrote of him? I think the latter. Anyhow, Bony and I were great chums, and ended by going into partnership over the Macallister Repeater—as I insisted on its being called, after him. It is forgotten now, and a living sentinel can be sniped, and his thoughts about his home cut short, nearly two miles farther off. For we live in a great Age. But while it lasted the run on the Macallister Repeater was phenomenal.

The first of these horrors was completed by us on my twenty-fourth birthday. It was not brought to the notice (or, at least, driven home to the notice) of the War Office till General Desprez's return from India some time after. But there it was, a highly finished and perfect instrument, for us to gloat over, as Nolly used to gloat over his bat. And there was I, one November afternoon I remember well, gloating over it in a rocking-chair in my Father's Snuggery, while Bony poured out the tea.

"When's that tea coming, Bony?" said I. "Look alive!"

"Stop a minute," said Bony. "Fly in the milk."

"I tell you what, Bony. I'm sure that oval ought to be decimal point nought one less on the short diameter——"

"He *will* kick so confoundedly, or I could get him out. Isn't that a good deal?"

"Well—say ought nine nine. Why don't you take the handle of the spoon?"

"I've got him! But he's brought a long striggle of cream out with him—he's tied up in it. I don't see that we can tell anything about it until it's been properly tested at the Butts. I'll put a little lukewarm water over him, and that 'll get him clear."

"Not too hot, you booby. When can Rawlings meet us at the Scrubs?"

"There's a letter from him—you open it. I say, look here! The beggar's all free except one leg——"

"Hm—hm—hm! Not before Thursday—what a bore! When's that tea coming, Bony?"

"Don't be in a hurry! You're such a hard-hearted chap. Give the poor beggar time to get his leg out."

"You've no need to stick there looking at him. You pour the tea—I'll see he's all right."

And two young men drank two cups of tea as they watched with animation the return of that fly to the active duties of life. As soon as the convalescent had drunk the milk off his person, and flown away clear, their attention was undividedly given to the implement of Hell which had absorbed it for more than a year. But even that flagged, and another topic dawned.

"What are you going to christen that Baby, Bony?"

"Mrs. Macallister's Baby?" For Bony was married! His very long engagement had terminated some months before, and the young couple had availed themselves of their power to add to their number like a Committee, and the new member was expected very shortly. Bony had the meanness to try to shuffle the whole responsibility on his wife, always speaking of the expected article as Mrs. Macallister's Baby.

"*I* want it to be Jeannie," said he. "Jeannie wants it to be Archie——"

"You'll have to make some concession about the sex."

"That's where it is! We don't want the same sex. She wants a he—I want a her. I expect she'll get her way. Women always do!" I contributed a remark that Time would show, and felt sagacious.

"I say, Joseph," said Bony, with the tone of one who is really approaching a subject, "whatever possessed you to make such a fool of yourself about Janey Spencer two years ago?"

"*I* didn't make a fool of myself, my dear boy. My Creator had anticipated me. You see I was left in his hands (as the Doctor says) when I was non-existent and couldn't speak for myself. Besides, *is* one a fool for asking such a nice girl as Janey to marry one?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"No—Archibald. I do *not*. I haven't the slightest idea what you mean."

"May I take away, Sir?" This of course was Pheener for the tea-things. *Nemine contradicente,* she culminated and subsided, closing the door on more or less tobacco smoke as she retired.

"Yes—you have," resumed Archibald. "You know I mean why on earth did you make such a muddle of the whole thing? Because you did. A most disgraceful muddle. You know quite well you were very sorry when she chucked you."

"How do you know anything about it?"

"Why, of course, Janey told Jeannie, and Jeannie told me. Of course I promised not to tell."

"And of course you've told! But what does your wife think was Miss Spencer's reason for breaking it off?"

"Because you didn't go about it the right way."

"Which is the right way? What did *you* say?"

"What did *I* say? Nothing at all! That's just the point. I expect you palavered too much."

"But, Bony! You must have said *something*—or perhaps you wrote a letter?"

"The idea! A letter, indeed! However, if you want to know, I'll tell you. We'd been having great fun at her Father's that evening—you came at the end of September, wasn't it? Well! This was Midsummer full moon I know. Jeannie came down the garden path to see me off the premises—you know the path outside that conservatory passage place—and when we got to the gate Jeannie gathered a rose to stick in my buttonhole and got rather close because it didn't work in easy, and I——" The narrative hitched very slightly and I supplied the hiatus.

"You'd better confess it all while you're about it, old chap. Now, on your honour! How often did you kiss Jeannie?"

"I didn't count 'em, old boy," said Bony, looking rather guilty. "P'r'aps Jeannie recollects. We heard my present Mother-in-law coming after us, and I got away. But it established a mutual understanding, and made explanations only necessary to bystanders. Old Mac was rather in a rage and said he couldn't bear anything underhand. I can't see that there was anything underhand about it. Jeannie was there, and I was there, and what more could you want?"

"What, indeed! But you know, Bony dear, people are different. For one thing Janey was twenty, and Jeannie was——"

"Seventeen. But I don't believe it was that, Joseph. I don't believe you were quite in earnest."

"I think I was though," said I, weakly. And Bony riposted incisively—"Stuff and nonsense! No one *thinks* he's in earnest. He knows he is, or he knows he isn't."

"You think that I ought to have gone about it the way you did."

"I don't know that. But I do think you *ought* to have been quite unable to help going about it that way under the same circumstances, and I'm afraid you weren't. Hookey, how late it is! Jeannie expects me home early to dress for dinner at Phillipses."

I sat in the half-dark when Bony had gone, wondering how far his belief was right. I could picture to myself the summer night, the leafy hush of the still garden, the smell of the roses, and the lovely face that the crying need for one in his buttonhole had brought so near to his own—and the natural consequences! How could it have been otherwise? But change the characters! It seemed disloyal—in feeling—to try such an experiment of imagination on poor Janey. But how *should* I have behaved? Let me shut my eyes and think—Well! honestly now, I believe, as a matter of fact, I might have done the very selfsame thing.

"But," cried Joe No. 2, breaking a long silence, "*could* you not have shaken hands decorously, like a well-behaved young gentleman? If you had tried, mind you, if you had tried?" I owned I thought I might, with self-restraint.

"But then," cried he again, and I flinched at what was coming, "how if it had been Lossie?"

Yes, that was the question! How if it had been Lossie?

I sat on in the twilight, forgetting everything, even the Macallister Repeater, dreaming of a past that for the moment became more real than my surroundings—more real than myself, for that matter.

I was brought to by a recrudescence of Pheener with the lamp. I was not grateful, for though I was aware of the necessity for the existence of a sad young man in the dark (to do the recollecting), still the things he remembered were happiness such as he could not make Hope beckon out of the future; and for the moment the whole of the present had slipped away.

"Cook says, Sir," said Pheener, when she had established the Lamp, "shall she put the soles down to do, or wait any longer for Master?"

I remembered that my Father had said something about being late because he was on an Arbitration job and he was acting j'intly with a couple of other charackters in the Building line, and he couldn't be sure how long they mightn't go on fooling. He implied that, if alone, he would make short work of any decision as dinner-time approached. In fact, he had an infallible guide for all Referees. "Be as unfair as you can to 'em all! Make 'em swear at you, one same as t'other! In six weeks they'll be saying give me Wance for an Arbitrator!"

"Let's see what o'clock it is now, Pheener," said I. And it had actually gone eight. "I had no idea it was so late. But there's nothing that will spoil?"

"Oh law, no, Master Joseph. It's only soles and rumpsteak."

"Suppose we wait till half-past and give him a chance." And Pheener departed to tell the cook.

We gave him the chance, and as he did not return I devoured one of the soles, and disfigured the rumpsteak, under the inspection of Pheener. Nothing is more hateful than gormandizing under a supervision which you know is taking stock of your generosity or stinginess, in grabbing the best bits for yourself or leaving them for later comers. Of course one hopes they have another piece of steak all to themselves in the kitchen—but the principle is the same. I tried to keep down the Socialisms that boiled up within me, urging me to ask Pheener to share the banquet, by chatting amiably with her about the state of trade and so forth. It softened the invidious inequality.

"I hope the Soles are cheaper than they were, Pheener?" For, with nobody to countenance me, I felt I was Lucullus.

"Indeed they're not, Master Joseph. These were two and three." I thought I would change the subject.

"What's become of that chap that had to be taken to the Police Station very carefully because he'd cut his throat and they were afraid the bandages wouldn't hold?"

"Oh—that Henderson chap? The magistrate cautioned him, and he promised not to do it again. But he was back at the Court three days after for feloniously intermarrying Mrs. Henderson, his first wife being still alive."

"Gracious, Pheener! You don't mean to say he went and got married with his throat in that state!"

"Law no, Master Joseph, of course not! He's been married twenty-two years and got fourteen children. And the first party she turned up intoxicated, and said she'd have his liver out. So he tried to cut his throat."

"I don't see that any other course was open to him."

"Beg pardon, Master Joseph?"

"Don't see what else the poor chap could do. But there was a Henderson who did plumber's work for the Governor—is he a relation?"

"Oh yes—he's his brother. But that's no rule!" And then Pheener went on without solving an enigma that forced itself into my mind. "*I* call it all a fuss about nothing—I should lock her up!" I let the enigma alone in favour of a question I wanted to ask Pheener. I was convinced my Father had dined out somewhere, and would be late, and I thought it a good opportunity.

"I say, Pheener! The other day—you know what I mean—was your Master——?" I hesitated.

"Yes, Master Joseph—I'm afraid he was. Not much, you know, but a little."

"I know. But, Pheener, do tell me! What was it making you all laugh in the kitchen?"

Pheener's manner changed, and she stood looking at the pattern on the carpet, and winding and unwinding an apron-tape on her finger.

"Did you hear us, Master Joseph?"

"Yes, Pheener—do tell me!"

"You mustn't be angry——"

"Angry with you? Indeed I won't!"

"I didn't mean me. I meant the Master."

"With my Father? I promise you I won't. Only tell me!" Pheener hesitated still a little, and then said: "He had only said what he's said before—once or twice.—Whenever he gets—like that, you know, he wants me to marry him. Do please not be angry, Master Joseph."

I won't disguise that I was a little shocked—but I do hope I didn't show it too plainly.

"What did you say to him, Pheener?" said I after a pause—rather a long one.

"I said he wasn't sober, and he said he was all right, as far as that went. But he wasn't, and he never is when he says things. And then he wanted to know what I should have said if he *had* been sober."

I really could hardly keep back a smile. My poor dear old Dad! "I say, Pheener," said I. "Tell me the truth now and I won't be angry. What *would* you have said?"

"Oh, Master Joseph, do only think how I nursed the Missis—and how I've seen to his linen all these years—and how I've tried (and I *have* tried) to put away the Whiskey-bottle——" and Pheener burst into tears.

"Bubbubut," said she, through her sobs, "I wouwouldn't say yes, and I wowon't say yes, as long as he's the least—like that! And he'll never say it when he's sober," said she, clearing up. "So where's the use of talking?"

And Pheener wiped her eyes and brought the pudding.

I couldn't see the use of talking either. So I merely said a word or two of absolution to the poor girl—it was no fault of hers!—and lit a cigar as she brought in the coffee.

I was so near having to dry my own eyes once or twice as I sat there thinking, that I should not have been sorry for a visitor. However, none came, so there I sate, and to take my mind off more painful themes, wondered what Mrs. Macallister's Baby would be like! I also wondered rather timorously what Lossie's little boy was like, for Lossie had one, now a year and a half old. She had written of him, at the date of his dêbut. "He is so exactly like Hugh—he really only wants a uniform to be put on the staff at once. Only the Regulations are so strict about size!" and later that his likeness to his Father had gone off and he was getting like his Uncle Joey. Then I made myself quite needlessly uncomfortable by thinking, suppose I am ever given the Baby to play with, and accidentally drop it into a sewer, or sit upon it a long time without finding it out and smother it, how shall I face Bony? I got so wretched over this gratuitous effort of self-torture that to shake it off I went out and finished my cigar in the street.

As I returned from a short saunter I saw a hansom cab coming in the opposite direction. The Fare was communicating through his lid, and the driver accepting his suggestions after eliciting confirmation; as his last remark, "Not if you don't speak plain," seemed to show. He then added that *he* wasn't drunk, for one! This seemed to carry an implication, and I quickened my steps. I was just in time to help my Father up, for his foot appeared to catch as he got out, and he stumbled on the pavement.

"He's all right," said the cabby, with a kind of gratified air, as one who had acquired an interest in a patient. And then added in explanation that another half-pint would do it, showing that by "all right" he really meant all wrong. If he had been a cabman of good feeling he would have driven away on receipt of a shilling too much, instead of standing at the door as if his part was to begin again soon, like the drum in an orchestra.

I got my Father into the house, and heard 2002 and his horse, and a policeman and his bull's-eye, comparing notes for several minutes after. Then they dispersed with raised voices of farewell, and wheels rolled one way and boots tramped the other.

My poor Dad was very nearly (if not quite) quite drunk—he was, in fact, worse than I remembered seeing him since one or two horrible recollections of babyhood. He evidently did not believe he had tumbled down, but he thought somebody else had, and wanted to go back and pick them up. With his usual candour he admitted his shameful condition, but seemed consoled by reflecting that his fellow Arbitrators, with whom he had dined, were a something sight worse than he. He said I should have seen them, and was really sorry I had lost the opportunity. I got him to bed and locked him into his room, and went to rest myself humiliated and heartbroken.

Whether I was wise to talk about it to Pheener next day, I don't know. But I felt so lonesome that I could not resist seeking for sympathy; especially in a quarter where the ice was already broken, and no further harm seemed likely to be done. She made me much more cheerful by making light of the occurrence. I take it to be a mark of the tacit respect men really have for women's idea of right and wrong, that whenever a man feels ashamed of himself or others, nothing is so consolatory to him as to be pooh-poohed by female authority.

"Only think now," said she, "of the Master tumbling down on the pavement and never knowing it. But they never will believe it, not if it's ever so!" And I thought I remembered more than one exactly similar occurrence in fiction. There was something soothing to me about Pheener's analysis of drunkenness; although I have no idea why I deferred to a kind of claim on her part, of knowing more about it than I did myself. Was it akin to Pring's parade of his mathematical ignorance as a vantage ground for the refutation of scientific conclusions? I don't believe she knew more about drunkenness from personal experience than Pring did about mathematics. But both took a superior tone with me.

I had also another motive than want of sympathy in talking to Pheener. She had gone up very high in my estimation from her resolution not to accept my Father unless he offered her a sober hand and heart. How many young women in her position would have surrendered at discretion! Consider the worldly improvement to a girl like Pheener! And yet, solely from her regard for him and his dead wife, she refused to jump at an offer made in an irresponsible condition, although she knew perfectly well that offer would be held binding. Do many women resist temptation on those lines? Do any men?

I felt I was making some return for this good conduct of Pheener, by showing my confidence in her, and talking freely on the subject that interested us both.

"I shan't stop and see him, Pheener," said I; "I'd better not. I *should* go out, anyhow; so I *shall* go out. I'm not going to Church—I shall go for a walk." Which looks as if my birthday fell on a Saturday. I suppose it did, for, drunk or sober overnight, my Father would not have lain in bed late any day but Sunday. "I shall go for a walk, and just you do as I tell you—I know I can trust you. Don't give him the Whiskey when he asks for it, and say I've taken it away. I *shan't* take it away, because it wouldn't be any use. He'd get more. But I want him to know what I think."

"All right, Master Joseph," said Phœner. And I went for a walk towards Wimbledon Common, and after a refreshing couple of hours came back through Upper Tooting and stopped at Poplar Villa.

CHAPTER XXXI

BUT DR. THORPE WAS IN TROUBLE HIMSELF, FOR THAT BEPPINO IS IN DISGRACE. NOLLY'S OPINION ABOUT BEPPINO'S FRIENDS. HOW BEPPINO WAS THRASHED. A PASSIONATE ADMIRATION. BEP REALLY VAIN OF IT. HOW JOE WAS UNFEELING TO HIM. HOW PHEENER TOOK AWAY THE BOTTLE.

WHEN one goes to a friend for sympathy, it is always safer to hear a little about his affairs before one begins to air one's own grievance, as he may be worse off than oneself. Luckily, I kept mine back when I first entered the Library at Poplar Villa, where I found Nolly and his father evidently very much depressed; and then, when I had heard the cause of their depression, decided that I would keep my Jeremiads about my own miseries for a future occasion. I selected a genial manner to say "Nothing wrong, I hope?" in; and felt that it was successful, as far as concealment of my own "something wrong" went. Nolly and the Doctor looked at one another, and gave a variety of doubtful hums and grunts, mostly interrogative. The latter postponed a pinch of snuff, and waited for responses from Nolly, who scratched his left temple slowly, and replied with a question. "What ought we to say?"

"I shouldn't say anything, only it's Joe," said the Doctor. "Being Joe, perhaps the fairest thing to say is that Joey has been making an ass of himself. No! I don't think it's worse than that." This was in reply to anticipated exception taken by Nolly, who thereon evidently locked up an opinion that, whatever it was, it *was* worse; but was none the less not sorry to lock it up, as his father took the responsibility.

"What's the Poet been doing?" I asked.

"Making love to his friends' wives," grunted Nolly. And I gave a very short whew, with a very long gamut.

"Only one, Nolly, only one!" said his father. "Let's be fair, even to Parnassus."

"Only one at a time," said Nolly. "We shall have more anon!"

"No, no, Noll! You're too hard on your brother. Let's be fair!

Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and I presume the wiggings also. Mrs. Tripey may be exceptional."

By this time the dialogue had told me the whole story, being helped by previous information. Beppino, as I always called him because his sister called him so, had been constantly at the house of Thornberry, with whom he had been on intimate terms since the bathing adventure at Lynmouth. Thornberry had married; but not the young lady of the entozoid, which his vitals had survived. The Poet had been a constant visitor at his friend's house, almost an inmate; and I understood was writing a poem which was to be a kind of diary of Helen of Troy, in Spenserian Stanzas. It was necessary to have recourse to a model for Helen, to stimulate his ideal. As long as the model didn't try to be like the original, this was no doubt all right enough; but a little too much dramatic fervour might evidently create a dangerous position. I have never been very fond of saying "I told you so," because every one else always does, and has spoken first; but on this occasion I did so, just for once.

"What on earth did you expect?" I asked. Dr. Thorpe took his long-postponed pinch of snuff, and Nolly said, "Exactly!"

"Why," I continued, "there was Beppino going about with that silly, pretty goose (she's pretty enough, but she *is* a goose), taking her to the play and Marshall & Snelgrove's, and all the time making believe she was Helen of Troy! What was Menelaus about all the while?"

"What was he about at Sparta? However, thank God the imitation of the original stopped short in time. Helen still adorns the hearth of Menelaus." And then Dr. Thorpe got a well-deserved sneeze, which it would have been rude to talk into, so we left him to resume his observations. "No—the real truth is simply that Joey has been an Ass, and the girl has been a goose."

Nolly looked incredulous. "If so," said he, "I don't see how you justify Thornberry—there could have been no sufficient ground for thrashing an old friend——" I interjected, "Did Thornberry thrash Bep?" and Nolly nodded briefly, and went on—"an old friend whom he was allowing his wife to go about with like this, unless——" And Nolly pulled up sharp.

"Unless Paris?" said his father expressively. And Nolly again said, "Exactly." I began asking what was Beppino's own version of the facts; but stopped, as the Doctor's next remarks seemed to me to cover the ground.

"I think, Noll, some weight ought to be attached to Joey's own statement. I think you are inclined to be hard upon him. Remember that he indignantly resents any accusation—of a Parisian nature——" And I thought I discerned, in the tone of the speaker, satisfaction at the discovery of a telling adjective.

"I daresay. But then in the same breath he says that even were it true, it would be his duty to resent it indignantly."

"So it would. But when we recollect that Helen and Menelaus are still at Dulwich (it *was* Sparta—now it's Dulwich) I think we ought to be satisfied. We have practically the word of all three. That should exonerate."

And the Doctor walked about the Library uneasily. I could see he was very miserable and uncomfortable, and I resolved I would say nothing to him about my misdemeanant. It would do equally well another time. Besides, it was only for consolation to myself—I did not anticipate his being able to give any direct help in my own difficulty. After one or two turns up and down the room, during which I endeavoured to give an exculpatory and hopeful tone to the conversation, he stopped and asked if Beppino was in his den. Yes, he was. Very well, then! He would go up and have a look at him; and presently we heard his voice and the delinquent's from afar.

"If the Governor gives him a good blowing up, it may do him good, even at his present age. But it's a pity he hasn't done it oftener, to my thinking." Thus Nolly, who then went on to improve the occasion in the sense which some rather one-sided views inspired. "You see what comes of Music and Poetry. They're all alike. He's got in with a gang of artists, as they call themselves. I should call some of them Authors and Musicians; but they all talk of themselves as Artists, and say they mustn't be interfered with. It's no use telling them they're fools."

"About the same use as telling other men they are fools, isn't it?"

"Oh no! Much less. They are connected with the Press. When they are told they're fools, they get a friend to insert a paragraph in a newspaper to say they're not."

"But haven't they plenty of enemies who write opposition paragraphs, to say they are?"

"That's exactly what they want! As long as the shuttlecock is struck at both ends, it keeps up. It's as I say—Painters and Poets and Musicians are all alike." And Nolly growled indignantly and lit a cigar.

"Come, I say now, Nolly, all Painters and Musicians don't make love to their friends' wives." Nolly wasn't quite prepared to admit this, but when pressed allowed that there were occasional exceptions. Even then he wouldn't let them off altogether. "Some of them," said he, "behave themselves with common decency because it's good taste, but none because it's right."

"I know a lot of most hard-working men, whom I should myself call great painters and sculptors, whose lives are blameless enough to please Mrs. Grundy herself."

"Ah yes—but these chaps of Beppino's are *Artists*—real *Artists*—who do precious little work. When they do it's inspired, and nobody can see the beauty of it outside their own circle. The chaps you mean are always pegging away, and aren't inspired at all."

"Well—never mind them! Tell me more about this business."

"I expected it all, you know, and wasn't surprised. You wouldn't have been if you'd seen them at Thornberry's. I went there once—twice. There was Beppino playing and singing old songs to Mrs. Tripey and her sisters. Ugh!"

"Well—but that was no harm, anyhow."

"Not if they hadn't spooned and fawned over the cub as they did. And then they made him read his Poems! Faugh!"

"What did he read?"

"Don't you know his beastly poem, 'A Trilogy of Fair Women,' —Jezebel, Messalina, and Mary Magdalen, I think they were? He might at least have softened some of the Scriptural expressions." From which it will be seen that Nolly objected to Anglo-Saxon authorized versions of Oriental ideas, as much as Lossie had done.

"But," I asked him, "what brought about the split between Menelaus and Paris? And how did it get to thrashing point?"

"Well! All we know is that yesterday we came back from town—I had called at the Museum in Jermyn Street for the Governor—and when we got to the house we heard a great row going on; and the Governor said, 'Why, that's Joey's friend Thornberry's voice.' And so it was. His voice and my precious little brother's, in great trepidation."

"What was Tripey saying?"

"As near as I caught it, it was, 'You miserable little sneak! If you dare to say that, I'll thrash you again.'—'Say what?' says Joey.—'Say Emily encouraged you,' says Thornberry. 'You know it's a lie as well as I do.'—'I did—didn't mean to say that,' says Joey, humbly, 'I only m-meant to say it's wasn't all me.'—'That's every bit as bad,' says Tripey, flashing out at him.—'Oh no—please, no,' says Joey. We heard all this on the other side of the fence—involuntary eavesdroppers. Then we came in, and I sang out, 'What's the row?'"

"And what was the row? At least, what was the explanation?"

"Joey gave his to the Governor, who took him away, into the house. I walked away with Thornberry. I quite sympathized with him, and I think in his position I should have done exactly what he did."

"I understand that he chastised Master Joey, who of course couldn't do anything in the way of self-defence. Wasn't that it?"

"Well! It was, rather, I'm sorry to say. It wasn't like that at my school. Nor yours?"

"Far from it! Too far, I should say. No matter how small you were, 'Hit back first, and think about it after' was the rule at St. Withold's. We accepted the injunction to offer the other cheek to the smiter, as meaning that we ought to give him another opportunity of provoking us behind the Cloisters where the fights were. But what was Tripey's account of the business?"

"Much what you might suppose! His wife came to him and complained of Bep having 'forgotten himself,' whatever that means, and said it was his duty to speak seriously. Of course Tripey wouldn't allow that Helen had been leading Paris on. Oh dear, no!——"

"I like him for that."

"So do I. Not a bad boy, Tripey! All the same she *had* led him on, keeping herself quite within the letter of the law, of course. And then the stupid little idiot—I'm half sorry for him all the while—being human myself——"

"And then the stupid little idiot——?"

"Well! As he expressed it to his father—he gets 'overtaken by a passionate admiration' for the minx—that's not the governor's expression, of course—and then the Apsley Packets suddenly entered *au fond du théâtre,* and there was a tableau!"

"If the Apsley Packets had come in five minutes sooner Bep would have been sitting on a chair at a respectful distance nursing his hat and cane, and being a real visitor. If they hadn't come in at all Mrs. T. wouldn't have rushed away to complain."

"I don't think we can wonder at her. Old Mrs. Apsley Packet was there. It wasn't only the young ones. The old lady was Mrs. Candour in this performance. But I tell you seriously, Joe, that I think it was a good job Mrs. Candour came in—Bep's weakness itself in this direction. However, he shouldn't have said that about 'encouragement' to the lady's husband. That was what made Tripey flare up. I must be off! I shall be late at

Hampstead." And Nolly departed, begging that I would soften things for his father as much as possible. I thought he might have done so more himself. But had he a still worse view of the imbroglio than he had actually admitted?

As I said nothing to Dr. Thorpe about my own affairs on the top of the Beppino scandal, and fortunately he had had no time to notice my own depression before he told me the cause of his, he remained quite ignorant of my Father's serious lapse; and when I parted from him late in the evening, I had, I hope, made his Sunday afternoon less miserable than it would otherwise have been. Nolly went away to the Spencers' at Hampstead, to say good-bye to the Alison Farquharsons. They had been back from his coffee plantations for a holiday, and were just starting again for Ceylon. You remember perhaps that this was Sarita Spencer's married name? As for Master Beppino, he kept out of the way. Ann reported that he was writing in his room—writing a few lines on to Helen of Troy, I suppose!

"What do you make of the Poet, Doctor?" said I, as we sat in the Library together after lunch.

"I'm not happy about him, Joe. Can't pretend I am. He doesn't seem to me properly ashamed of himself. He disclaims any real offence with indignation; but constantly lets out an implication that a man does no real wrong if he makes love to his friends' wives under reservation. I can't make out quite whether he considers this sort of thing as a privilege to which poets and artists and persons of *geist* are to be admitted, on the ground that good taste would never break the seventh commandment. Perhaps he does."

"I'm not a person of *geist*, so I'm no judge. If I had been the little brother of a child I found weeping in the street this morning, I should have done exactly what he did. He had been lent a half-sucked pear-drop on condition that he should only take one suck and give it back, and as soon as he'd fairly got it in his mouth he ran away. But then I don't want other little boys' pear-drops."

"I see the application of the story. Let us hope Joey will get a new pear-drop all to himself. I find a sort of satisfaction in talking as if he was a baby. In fact, I'm grateful for your comparison."

The Doctor dwelt a good deal on this idea; and then we chatted of other matters. He never alluded now to the termination of my engagement to Jane Spencer. I had, of course, talked of it to him at the time; but we had both steered clear of the real underlying reason, though each saw the other's mind. All the same, I knew perfectly well that in his heart he had hoped for a new pear-drop for me, all to myself, as well as for the Poet. I asked him whether he thought Nolly was in the way to anything of that sort, and he replied, "Well—I shouldn't like to say—things are always going on. Nothing at this moment though, I fancy."

So I did not catechize him, and presently he said he had got the wrong spectacles, and would go and get the others. He could find them best himself.

I heard a furtive footstep outside. It was Master Beppino, who had seized the opportunity of his father's absence—not being, I suppose, very keen for publicity—to come and gather the opinions of Europe about his escapade. I shouldn't word it this way; only that I found before he had been two minutes in the room with me, that he was really very vain of it.

"Come in and show your face, Bep," said I; "I hear you've been distinguishing yourself?"

"Oh no, Joe Vance," said he. I can't pretend to spell or describe his mincing and drawling accent; but it may give some clue to it that he distinctly called me *Juvence*. "You mustn't quite say that! You shouldn't be so severe on a poor chap—not for this sawt of thing!" I expressed uncertainty about what the sort of thing was, and found that the "poor chap" was deriving much satisfaction from leaving it in doubt. He evidently was hanging longingly on the outskirts of Don Juan, so to speak, and was reluctant to give up such honours as he felt entitled to.

"When a gyairl like Emily Thornberry——" said Beppino, and then went off at a tangent. "However, I'm reely not qualified to say anything about Tripey. He's an excellent fellow and all that sort of thing. But a gyairl like Emily asks for more——"

"*You* didn't ask for more yesterday when you had your licking, anyhow, Bep?"

"Oo—Juvence! How can you be so—*brootle!*"

"Well!" said I, "perhaps I am rather brutal. Why, he's double your size!" It really was impossible to wash one's mind of the idea of the extreme youth of the delinquent. His further apologies (or self-gratulations) were cut short by Dr. Thorpe's return. "I stayed to put my boots on, Joe," said he. "I'll walk back a bit of the way with you."

And he accompanied me as far as Clapham Common, and then turned back, putting up his umbrella in a drizzle that had begun. I made my way home chilled and dejected.

My Father had not gone to bed. He was in a heavy snoring sleep in the big leather armchair in the Snuggery, with his silk handkerchief over his head as usual. There was no bottle on the table beside him, and I inferred that the faithful Pheener had been more than true to her trust. I thought it best to rouse the sleeper. "It's all right, Nipper dear," said he, "it's all right. I'm ashamed of myself—don't you fret!"

I could have cried outright like a child. "Oh, Daddy, Daddy," said I, "don't talk of it—let it alone. What does it matter?"

But my Father was not going to accept assistance from prevarication. "P'r'aps nothing matters," said he. "But it seems to me this matters as much as anything else. *I'm* not going to occur again, though—not if I can help it! I've made a beginning straight off. Little Clementina's took away the bottle!"

I couldn't help laughing at this and felt almost cheerful—the first time that day. "Never mind, Dad," said I, "we'll get it all right somehow."

He evidently thought that he had made enough confession to justify a review of extenuating circumstances. "Champagne," said he, "is pison, even Voove Click-what, and a man can't check what he swallers. I wasn't singin' though, Nipper, was I?"—I said certainly not!

"Not 'a Landlady of France she loved an Officer, 'tis said,' nor 'stick 'em up again in the middle of a three-cent pie'?"

"Neither of them—quite certain." My Father seemed reassured. "That's *something,* anyhow," said he. "The other Arbitrators was singin' both. Likewise 'Rule Britannia.' Weak-headed cards, the two on 'em!"

"I'm afraid you won't get any change out of that, Dad," said I, "because you never *do* sing." My Father ignored the elenchus.

"One of these cards," pursued he, apparently with a view of showing the unmusical character of his companion, "was a ship-builder—t'other's a housebreaker!" I made a comment. "Not a professional 'and. It's a business, is housebreaking, and a paying one at that. He gives you a estimate and pulls you down and carts you away off the ground at so much a load, or pays you so much down for your carcase. Then when you rebuild he sells you your stock brick back at a pound a thousand took as they rise bats and all, and you charges them on as noo if the Clerk of Works don't cut in or won't take a fiver to hold his tongue."

"That doesn't sound honest—to an outsider."

"It's honest if you says as I do to the customers, 'Here's me and Coxeter & Bulstrode (that's his firm—*his* name's Sims)—are going to lie and cheat and ewade our obligations as hard as ever we can—so just you see that it's allowed for in the schedule or contract, as the case may be——"

These revelations paused on the entrance of Pheener with a tray on which I perceived a whiskey-bottle with hot water and lemons.

"I did just like you said, Master Joseph," said she. "I wasn't going to let him have it, and he didn't have it. But I told him I'd bring it in when you came back. They do say it's best not to cut 'em off altogether."

Pheener said this as one who had been in the way of good authorities; so I took her word for it, especially as I thought I had somewhere heard the same thing myself, and mixed a reasonable nightcap for my Father. Pheener removed the bottle religiously as soon as ever I had poured out a wineglassful. My poor Daddy sat looking on, with a rather ridiculous half-rueful expression on his face. "All right," said he, "you carry it off and lock it up. *I* won't marry you if you don't," which was a funny way of landing such an important subject suddenly on the tapis. Pheener's way of receiving it was original, and did her credit, to my thinking. "If," she said, "I have to carry away the whiskey from all the gentlemen that ain't going to marry me, I shall have my hands full, Master Joseph," and disappeared with it, wishing us good-night with perfect gravity.

"Little Clementina's a nice girl," said my Father, hanging over his grog as there was no more coming, and making the most of it. "What's your opinion, Nipper?"

My opinion was favourable as far as it went; but awaited development of the subject. It came.

"I shouldn't 'ave the 'art to marry again, after your mother, Joey—I'm a sort of male widder by nature. But if I wasn't I might do worse than little Clementina," and my Father lighted his pipe and paused for encouragement—which was not forthcoming. The fact is, I had gone to Dr. Thorpe hoping for guidance on this very point, which was impending; and now felt so sick with the difficulties of life, that I let him smoke his pipe out without saying anything, and then announced that I had a headache and should go to bed. It was past one o'clock before I turned in, after four-and-twenty of the most unsatisfactory hours I ever spent in my life.

The subject may be said to have remained on the tapis by common consent, without any one pursuing it, or embarking on it, or trenching on it, or doing anything one does with subjects except avoiding it. Next Sunday I went again to Dr. Thorpe and found him alone. Nolly had vanished to a great cricket match somewhere in the country, and Beppino had shown a judicious delicacy; going away to his rooms at Oxford.

"He's somewhere else, at any rate," said the Doctor, "and for the present I can't say I'm sorry. How's your father?"

"I wanted to talk about him, Doctor. He's been giving trouble again. Poor old Dad!"

"Poor old Joe," said the Doctor, looking at me wistfully. "Walk round the garden and tell me all about it."

The pears were a poor and late crop this year. For to-day must have been the twenty-sixth, as my birthday was the eighteenth, and the fruit was not near picking yet. We noticed this with a common consciousness of old memories, and then I went back to my Father. I narrated the occurrence of yesterday week. "But," said I, "it is *possible* that he was really mistaken about how much champagne he could safely take, as he rarely drinks anything but whiskey. He was upset at Vi's wedding, but was very good for a long time after." I always spoke of it as Vi's wedding—never Lossie's.

"Let's make the most we can of it, anyhow—give good fortune the benefit of the doubt. But you say Seraphina Dowdeswell (it tickles me so that name, that I always say it when I can)—Seraphina Dowdeswell beards the lion in his den and carries away his whiskey-bottle?"

This led naturally to a narrative of my conversation with Pheener on the Saturday at dinner, and of how my Father had angled for my sanction since. "I shouldn't like," said I, "to say anything to influence, one way or the other, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you advised me to."

"Go along with you, Joe! Putting the responsibility off on me! However, I'll think about it." We said nothing further then, but when we were sitting together that evening he resumed the subject.

"I've been thinking it well over, Joe, and I'm of opinion—now you mustn't be shocked—" I said I wouldn't, and he took a very long pinch of snuff before proceeding—"I've come to the conclusion—that-they'd-better-be-married." The middle of this remark was filled with a sneeze worthy of its provocation, and the last words came with a run. The Doctor then shut down the lid of his snuffbox rather as if he had married the couple and shut them both in, and gave two taps on the lid to record the number inside.

"I'm only thinking of my Mother," said I.

"I'll be answerable for that. Your Mother would be certain to think first of your Father's welfare. Besides, you may be pretty sure there's a satisfactory arrangement on the other side. You may safely leave it all in God's hands."

His spontaneous confidence in a hereafter was so strong that it often bubbled up like this, and could not be kept down. But he would then defer slightly to what he called Orthodoubt, apologizing as it were to some supposititious Mrs. Grundy in whose eyes such confidence counted as indecency.

"Of course," he continued, "I shouldn't say so if Vi was here. But when it's only you and me we may be as improper as we like. It's a very funny thing, though, when you come to think of it, that one should have one's mouth shut on this subject by the Family Representative of Religion! It's a curious Nemesis of the Correctitudes——"

"When I'm with you, Doctor, I always think as you do. When I'm alone I get frightened."

"Why should you be frightened, my dear boy? After all, it's a question of one's sense of humour. If I were to catch myself non-existing after death, I should simply die of laughter. It would really be too absurd if the thing that did the knowing stopped, and the known was left entirely to its own devices. But you always say you don't understand that idea. So let's talk about your Father and let Metaphysics alone. What do you really think yourself, putting your Mother out of the question till we all get across?"

"I think my Father's chances of fighting his enemy would be greater with an ally."

"And you think Clementina—no! Seraphina—Dowdeswell would be a good ally?"

"She's the only one that offers. Perhaps it isn't fair to say she's offered. But she would accept."

"You see, my boy, it *is* in God's hands. Just you leave it there."

I don't know how far I was taking it out of the hands of the Almighty by saying to Pheener, as I did at the next opportunity, that next time my Father wanted to marry her she needn't ask my leave.—Pheener merely said, "Yes, Master Joseph, thank you!" and the household went on as usual. But I felt raw and cold and thin, and that all the past I had known was sliding away from me, and no future was coming to take its place. Consolation had to be extracted from the activities of life; and I really believe that my

Guardian Angel, or some other beneficent unseen agency, often staved off a too great oppression of melancholy which might have ended in a razor, by some sudden sweet suggestion of composite differential interchanging movements of axes of vibration—or some such thing. I haven't the slightest idea what this one means, having put it together at random; but mechanisms of an equally bracing nature were often shot down from the blue to occupy my mind and avert suicide. I know of nothing like invention to make life palatable.

But even in this field unpleasantness cropped up. For one day running my eyes through the advertisements in the *Engineer* I came suddenly on one with a beautiful picture that struck my mind as very familiar. And the text described it as McGaskin & Flack's Spherical Engine with Double Reciprocity Movement! And annexed to that text were testimonials to the effect that it developed a circus-full of horses' power on the brake more than was promised; that it had run a thousand hours without heating and would evidently have run a thousand more only for the Strike; that its consumption of oil was so small that your little bottle you sent with it was still nearly full and so forth. I must say I was in a great rage, and it certainly did me good.

"What do you think of *that,* Bony?" said I, throwing him the journal. And Bony gave one of his longest whistles on record.

"Think," said he. "What did I tell you, Joe Vance? That's the man that called me underhand! I should like to know why it's underhand to kiss an engineer's daughter when she likes it. Anyhow, it's much more underhand to pirate an invention."

"Of course I could institute proceedings," said I. "I'll see a solicitor about it."

"No, you won't, old chap, I know you too well." And then something occurred to me. "Why, of course," I said, "because of Mrs. Macallister and Mrs. Macallister's baby. No, of course I shouldn't—I didn't recollect she was the old humbug's daughter."

"Now, you see what a double-dyed old sneak my respectable Father-in-law is. He knows perfectly well you won't act, because of upsetting Jeannie. And he called *me* underhand, because I kissed, etc.," and Bony enlarged at some length on his grievance, pointing out that if he had asked Jeannie to promise to marry him it would have been different. "But," said I, "you considered yourself bound to her?" He replied of course he did, adding, "But then it was *I* did the kissing! If she'd kissed me I should have considered it a promise."

"Whenever is that blessed baby coming, Bony?"

"It's been due ever so long. And the nurse has another engagement next month. So if it doesn't arrive in a fortnight there'll be the Doose's own Delight."

Satan missed this little gratification, for Archie junior appeared four days after the conversation. He in due course announced, through his agents, his desire to enter the Christian Church as Archibald Stephenson Macallister, and invited me to be present on the occasion of his induction.

I wasn't at all sorry to have something to look forward to, as the plot continued to thicken at home—if there *was* a plot. I should have said that the author of the drama—if it *was* a drama! —was very unskilful, and lacked constructive power. For the approach of the climax was only shown by an increase of my Dad's effrontery in representing Miss Dowdeswell as yearning for wedlock. "You keep your eyes on them boots, little Clementina, and see Cook doesn't put 'em too near the fire, or I won't marry you," and "You tell Cook the soup was all pepper—and blow her up sky-high, or I won't marry you," and "Shut that door when you go out, or I won't marry you, little Clementina," are examples of the way in which he strove to envelop himself and Pheener in a sort of halo of Matrimony, with a view, as I thought, to make me the originator of a serious discussion on the subject. This conjecture proved true, for on my saying to him one day after dinner that I should really like to know how far he was merely joking, and whether he was not a little in earnest, he replied with a much nearer approach to seriousness, that she *was* a nice girl and one might do much worse than little Clementina. "Very easily," said I, "but would you be more comfortable if you were to marry her?"

"Well, Nipper dear," said he, after smoking a long time beside his allowance, conceded from a bottle Pheener had carried away, "I won't marry little Clementina nor anybody else——" He stopped without a full stop—perhaps with a comma—and waited for me to supply something he might contradict. I supplied it rather too late for dramatic effect, as I was watching a beautiful smoke ring I had despatched across the table. When it died away I merely said, "Well, Daddy dear, I shan't run away from here till you do——"

"Don't you be in such a hurry, Nipper," said he. "I was going to say (only you must be interrupting) that I wouldn't marry little Clementina or any one else, not without first consulting the Doctor."

"Good Gracious, Dad," said I. "Are you afraid of your lungs or your heart, or what's the matter?"

A certain placid satisfaction on my Father's face showed me that he would soon find materials for a distinct statement in the opportunities for contradiction he was creating for himself.

"Nothin' whatever," said he. "Never was better in my life!" Then I asked him why on earth did he want to consult the Doctor? He replied with another question, and an air of injury. Did I ever know him consult a Doctor about his health? If he had anything wrong with his witals, wasn't a doctor the very last person he should consult—if I came to that, the only person in the world he shouldn't consult? A light broke upon me, and I perceived that Dr. Thorpe was the intended arbiter.

"Why, of course, Nipper! And I was tellin' you so, only you interrupted me. The idea of me consultin' a doctorin' doctor!"

But it struck me very strongly that, however complimentary such a reference might be, it would hardly be fair, after my late conversation with Dr. Thorpe, to throw such a responsibility on him. My Father cogitated a little, and admitted it. "Maybe you're right," said he. And he remained silent and reflective through a whole pipe.

I never was surprised at anything my Father did. So when Pheener came in with the accustomed question—was there anything else?—I was scarcely taken aback at his replying, "Yes, little Clementina. You can marry me if you like," and going on lighting a new pipe. Pheener stood half in the doorway as one who was waiting to hear what else there was, and said, "What does Master Joseph say?" Master Joseph interposed no obstacles. "I think, Master," said the young lady, "I should like to speak to Cook, and tell you to-morrow."

I got away early to-morrow, leaving matters to arrange themselves. On my return I found that Cook, a person of great delicacy of feeling, had advised Pheener that if she accepted Master, she was bound at once to fly the house and join her relations in the country until the wedding-day. Accordingly, she packed her box, got a four-wheeler, and looked in at my Father at breakfast. "I shall be very happy to, Master," said she. "All right, little Clementina," said he. "Tell Cook another boiled egg," which Pheener did, and then drove away before my Father realized the position.

"I suppose it's all right," said he, when Cook appeared with the egg and an explanation, "but *I* call it 'umbuggin'."

When I returned, finding that the matter might be regarded as settled, I arranged my own plans—and wrote to Lossie, of course—a very long letter this time. I thought I would defer sending it a little for fear of having to counter-write it all later. There might be slips between the cup and the lip.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW JOE MET JANEY AGAIN. HE IS LEFT ALONE WITH HER AND FEELS QUEER. HOW HE WILL WRITE IT ALL TO LOSSIE. MATCHMAKING JEANNIE. THEY ARE ALONE SOME MORE. A RAPPROCHEMENT ON BONY-JEANNIE LINES. HOW JOE'S WALK HOME WAS HAPPY.

ARCHIBALD STEPHENSON MACALLISTER'S wishes must have been misrepresented, for he crumpled himself up and turned purple when presented for the sacred rite of Baptism. He raised a powerful voice in protest, and ended by sneezing violently, after which he gave it up as a bad job, and consoled himself with the bottle.

I did not witness this personally, as there was some difficulty about his Father and myself both being absent from the Works at the same time. But I had a graphic account of it from Miss Jane Spencer. Master Archibald, in fact, served to pave the way to an easier relation between me and Janey. There had naturally been a certain stiffness, since our disruption. It could not well have been otherwise. But we had met occasionally by accident, and had had to accept the position as it stood, and do as much as possible to exempt bystanders from having to include us among *their* embarrassments. Appointments suddenly recollected by the one or the other had done great service in enabling us to bear our own. I think this Christening party, which I joined later in the day, was the first time she and I had met for nearly two years without possibility of retreat for either.

She was just coming out of the tea-encumbered reception room as I went in, and we shook hands with a routine smile. And I know that Maisie Maxey, sixteen, who was standing by, made a mental note of our demeanour as probably the correct one for a couple that had "broken it off," and thought she was really seeing the world. I saw this fact in Miss Maxey's large blue eyes, which stood wide-open like street doors. Then I went in and had tea, and went upstairs. There I came upon Master Macallister, who after a deep sleep following exhaustion from renouncing the Devil and all his works, had waked up and was being carried round to be shown to Society, select members of which were permitted to kiss him, but with caution and reserve. I was one of the privileged few—my relations with his father at St. Withold's settled that!—and was told by Jeannie that it was ridiculous to complain (as I had done) that his cheek was too small to kiss! What could I expect at six weeks?—Wasn't it absurd, Janey? Miss Spencer assented indignantly, and kissed him herself; it was the other cheek, so it did not prejudice our relations in any way. But it would have been stiff not to chat, after such a narrow escape of kissing the same one. And thus it was that I came to have such a full account of the rebellious Paganism of Master Archie.

Having given me these particulars on the subject of public interest—just as strangers converse freely and unbend at a Fire or a really satisfactory Accident, with loss of life,—it seemed to be only the natural course of things for Janey to say, "I hope old Mr. Vance keeps well."

"Oh yes, very well. You know he's going to be married?"

"No—indeed I didn't!" And the valedictory atmosphere that hung about her last remark dispersed and interest awakened. But Janey evidently felt that discussion between us, with interest, would be a new departure; and thought it belonged to the position not to embark on it without an apology. The hazel eyes looked straight at me. "I may ask, mayn't I?" said she; "I should so like to hear about it. You know I used to like your Father so much."

Used to! And no signalman on the railway of Life came out of a box and showed a red flag, as he should have done. If he was there, he was asleep. But not content with her mistake in referring to a closed chapter of our volume, Janey proceeded to make matters worse by calling special attention to the fact that there were passages that need not be forgotten, thereby isolating and emphasizing what it was better to forget.

"I don't mean," she went on, "that I don't—that I shouldn't—that I don't like him now. Well—you know what I mean! Anyhow, do please tell me about his marriage——" And Janey got out of the dangerous ground, as one escapes from sinking in a morass by a sudden rush for a hard island.

I told her all about the domestic event, ungrudgingly enough. For I rejected with scorn the idea that such excessive caution was necessary. Was it not a want of confidence in Janey, almost a disrespectful one, to consider it so? As for myself, it came to the same thing whatever happened. If (for Joey No. 2 was getting uneasy on the subject) there should be any recrudescence of Janey—well! so much the better! If not, it really wasn't a hanging matter.

Ought it not to have been one? Had I any right to dismiss, as I did, the possibility of a stronger interest than my own, under what may have been the pretext that it was a point of honour to show confidence in Janey by doing so? I hope I deceived myself.

I gave then a complete account of my Father's eccentric second courtship, and Janey laughed a good deal thereat; so much so, in fact, that it was necessary to wipe her eyes. When she had done this I think we both felt that a let's-be-serious wave was due, and we settled down to it without going back to a society tone, which showed that we were comfortabler.

"It's all very fine to laugh," said she, "but I'm afraid it's no laughing matter to you. Shall you go on living with your Father?"

"Oh, no! It's too rum! You have no idea how queer and uncomfortable it is—and all without any of us wanting to make any discomfort, or show any little tempers in the matter. It does seem hard that when there are so few people to consult, and none of the Regulation sources of misery, that human nature should be unable to take advantage of it and be happy. Of course if there was to be a settlement one would clear the decks for action. But there won't be one." Janey looked very grave. "There *ought* to be a settlement," said she.

I did not enter into any discussion of this point, as Janey's remark was one I have always heard made under the same circumstances, apparently automatically. I have always classified it as an involuntary decision of well-regulated intellects, a sort of Judicial Sneeze on their part, and have, so to speak, waited until they had put away their pocket-handkerchiefs. "But after all," Janey continued, "the happiness of the parties is the first consideration—almost more than the settlement. As Papa isn't here I may say so. You really think Seraphina Dowdeswell with the impossible name will make your Father a good wife?"

"Yes, at least Seraphina Vance will. One thing I'm certain of—Phœner will carry away the whiskey-bottle."

No sooner had the words passed my lips than I felt I had made a mistake. "What *I* was to have done," was certainly what Janey did *not* say; yet she stood there visibly abstaining from saying it, with the most creditable resolution. I saw it as plain as words could speak, in a smile that, being firmly restrained at the mouth, forced its way into the eyes, and would not be denied. I considered it best to go on.

"But she'll never be cured of calling me Master Joseph—

nor altogether cured of waiting at table. *Naturam expellas furca*——"

"I don't know what that means.—Never mind! Tell me what your own plans are, if you don't go on living at home?"

"Can't say, exactly. I may take lodgings near here for a while—perhaps go away in the spring and try to induce France or Germany to take up the Macallister Repeater. You know about it."

"I know. Hideous thing! You can kill seven people seven miles off in seventy seconds. Isn't that it?"

"That's about it."

"And if fifteen persons are interested in the lives of each you can make seven times fifteen—seven times ten, seventy, seven times five thirty-five—seventy and thirty is one hundred and five is five—you can actually make one hundred and five people unhappy *all* at once in seventy seconds. Oh, Mr. Vance, I do congratulate you from the bottom of my heart!"

"Yes, and if it were a hundred and five thousand perhaps nations would think twice before rushing into war."

"I think I see your idea. Perhaps you're right."

We were in the large front drawing-room nearly alone. Something in human form was waiting till its carriage was announced, and airing its skirts at a fire in the back drawing-room. Jeannie and her husband were seeing guests out down below, with an amount of shouting and riot that seemed quite out of proportion to the actual size of the ostensible cause of the gathering; on whose behalf I heard appeals for silence, lest he should be waked. But no sooner had the noise subsided than alarums were heard as of a six-weeks-old baby in a violent passion—possibly the result of the sudden silence. Then of a rush of succour and apology from below. Then of a belated carriage arriving in a hurry for the human creature, who (never having been introduced to Janey or me) expressed by a graceful movement the great sweetness she would have shown us had we not been separated by an impassable gulf, and vanished from our lives forever. As soon as she was gone we got a little stiffer, because we were alone. Although not introduced she had served as a sort of buffer state, through whom no contraband could pass. Less metaphorically, there could be neither reminiscence nor recrimination while she was so near at hand.

I can assure you it is a very odd sensation to be left alone with a young lady who two years before you had made certain would be your wife. One effect it had on me was to make me recite to myself that portion of a letter I should shortly write which would describe the oddness of that sensation to—Lossie! (This simultaneous arrangement of a letter to Lossie occurred alongside all notable events.) A perceptibly awkward silence followed. It was a mistake in me to stay after the exit of the human carriage-owner. And every minute of irresolution made a bolt more difficult. I felt it necessary to say something about something, and decided on weather. At the end of November it was safe to say we should soon have Christmas round again, and I committed myself so far. Janey looked at a newspaper and wondered if it was to-day's. I wished Jeannie or Bony would desert their treasure and come to the rescue; but neither came. I felt that absolute silence wouldn't do and to break it told a deliberate lie without a particle of foundation.

"There's very little in the newspapers nowadays."

"Do you think so?" I felt it was unfair of Janey to resort to the *Daily News,* because it gave her an appearance of tranquillity and self-command as she stood pretending to read it, and I had no counter-resource. I evaded the point, and hoped nothing was the matter with Baby. "Perhaps I ought to go up and see," said Janey. I thought of saying please don't, and contrasted it with please do; but neither seemed good, on reflection. Janey turned her eyes off the paper to hear better, and apparently thinking that silence was suspicious, decided on going up. But when she got to the door she shook off all disguises, and quite suddenly coming out of ambush with, "Come, Mr. Vance, I told you you had spoiled a good friendship, and so you had. But there's no reason why we shouldn't have a good acquaintanceship—so shake hands on it and really forget and forgive all round,"—held out her hand to me and met mine with a cordial shake, running away upstairs before I had time to do more than acquiesce.

I sat arranging the relation of all this to Lossie, and awaiting the reappearance of Bony or Jeannie. The part of the letter I found most troublesome was the proof of my certainty of what Miss Spencer had thought when I mentioned the whiskey-bottle. I could exactly picture Lossie to myself saying, "Silly boy! How can he be so fanciful!" and then I wondered whether she had kept her complexion in the hot climate, and would she come back thin and dry? I worded some enquiries on these points for the letter. "But I want you to tell me more about Janey Spencer," said the image in my mind. "Never mind whether I'm thick or thin—you'll see some day!" So I filled out the unwritten letter with particulars of how unhappy it made me to think of the motive Janey appeared to ascribe to me. "I know I shall say something about it to her and break up all the old ground again [so the letter was to run] if I see much of her," and the image of Lossie brushed back its hair in the old way, and the blue-grey eyes looked at me in the old way from under the same long eyelashes, and it said in the old voice, "You silly Joe Vance! Make up your mind one way or the other. If you don't love Janey Spencer at least half as much as you love me, keep out of her way and make an end of it." So I resolved to follow a previously declared intention, and go back home to dinner, and as I chose to consider that I should be acting unselfishly in going away without disturbing any one, I went down alone, and found my coat and hat and umbrella. But I was reckoning without my host, for Bony came running down, having heard me on the stairs. Did I make a noise on purpose, I wonder?

"I say, old chap, you *must* stop to dinner—you really *must*," then in a lower tone, "You know, Janey will be very uncomfortable if you don't. She'll think you haven't forgiven her."

"Oh, but indeed—it's nothing to do with Janey. It's only because I must get a letter off to etc., etc., and I've got to post a cheque to etc., etc., and I've got to meet etc., etc., at half-past six to-morrow morning," and more to the same effect.

"Yes, but Janey's sure to think it's her. And the poor girl has been doing the best she can to make things comfortable. And just consider how uncomfortable it will be if she marries Oliver Thorpe, and you don't feel on an easy footing."

"Ho!" said I. "Janey's going to marry Nolly!"

"Well! *I* don't know. *I* say nothing. Only Jeannie says he admires her very much."

"It's not up to congratulation point, anyhow?"

"Better ask Jeannie—remember, *I* know nothing—perhaps it's only an idea of hers. You'd better stop and then she'll tell you."

My two identities decided to stop to dinner on two different grounds. I, because I felt securer against any possible revival of an old story, and also because I felt glad to hear of the new one for Nolly's sake; and Joe No. 2 because he felt hurt and didn't know why, and because he had an unreasonable objection to Janey marrying any one else. "How *can* you have one?" said I to him. "Remember the life you led me at Oxford four years ago!" "Anyhow, *he* should stop to dinner," so he said.

What followed convinces me now that if it is rash to reckon without one's host, it is still rasher to reckon without one's hostess. You see, a young lady who has married her first love with no greater hardships than are involved in a two years' engagement, spent in looking at premises (which as long as you are not obliged to come to conclusions is the greatest joy on earth), going to dances, and unpacking the wedding presents to look at them—such a young lady, I say, if all goes well in her first year of matrimony, is sure to want all her single friends to be as happy as herself. Therefore Jeannie, who at seventeen was already an inveterate matchmaker, was no sooner married than she turned to, and almost pushed all the eligibles into one another's arms. She thought nothing of asking early twenties to lunch with late teens, in carelessly selected couples, and comparing the colour of their eyes and hair across the table. If they were nearly the same length, she would measure them back to back. The pretences she would make in order that they should be left alone in the garden or drawing-room really rose to the height of a Fine Art. A panic-stricken couple so entrapped had been known to seek refuge in a mutual confession of plighted troth elsewhere. But Jeannie scored, for in six months they were both faithless, and, as she triumphantly said, had made it up after all!

Therefore for any two unmarried persons of opposite sexes to remain to dinner at Mrs. Jeannie's was really to put their heads in the lioness's mouth. Of course Janey and I, who were in a sense the two Protomartyrs of her system of persecution, were on our guards. But this only made Mrs. Macallister more unscrupulous.

Whether she said to her husband, "There now! He's going away—he's running away from Janey! I told you he would! Do run down and say she's engaged to Mr. Thorpe," I don't know, but if she did it was clever. For it made my image of Lossie in India say, "You see, you silly Goose, it's all been settled for you. So now you needn't fuss." And I joined the trio at dinner in a spirit of honest acquiescence in the "good acquaintanceship."

We chatted in full familiarity over my Father's intended marriage. Jeannie and Bony each rotated on the axis of Duty in connection with settlements, which came forward somehow, unsought by me. "There ought to be a settlement," said both solemnly.

"That's what Nolly and I are always quarrelling about," said I; "he's getting quite a great authority on these matters, I understand."

I never saw more perfect unconsciousness and candour in two hazel eyes in my life than in the pair that looked at me across the table.

"I haven't seen Mr. Oliver Thorpe for ever so long," said their owner. "How is he?"

I don't think the glance that crossed the other diameter of the table was nearly so unconscious—it was equally guilty each way, I suspect. I was surprised—agreeably, Joe No. 2 said, but I denied it viciously, and felt I could kick him. Janey looked at me for an answer to her question, with added enquiry about my surprise. Jeannie showed presence of mind, and dragged Janey away upstairs abruptly, before I could answer either enquiry. I realized that I should hear more about that, before the evening was over.

There were alarums and excursions upstairs while we smoked our cigars; causing Bony to take his out of his mouth to listen—but it was evidently too good to desert. Besides, the household was always fermenting about its new member. We smoked to scorch-point and then found Janey alone in the drawing-room.

"Jeannie's just gone up again," said she. "But I'm sure Baby's all right—I was up there just now." But the anxious Father (now there was no cigar to finish) would not be soothed with such testimony, and thought he had better go up and see. So there we were alone again—and the protection of the alleged engagement to Nolly much more than doubtful.

Janey never let the grass of uncertainty grow under her feet. "What *did* you mean, Mr. Vance, by looking so scared when I asked after Mr. Oliver Thorpe?"

When evasion is impossible one decides on confession, and makes a merit of it. I confessed, and continued apologetically:

"It was only a word from Bony a few minutes before we went to dinner. I daresay I made too much of it. When one would be very glad to hear news if it *were* true, one is apt to think it *is* true—one doesn't enquire too closely." And Joe No. 2 protested against being included in my profession of gladness. "In the present case I may allow myself to say that I thought my old friend a most fortunate man." And in order to avert difficult personal metaphysics, I endeavoured to throw into my remark an ingredient of the polished Man of the World who deems a tribute to your charming sex necessary. It was a failure. Janey caught the weak point instantly—she was a true solicitor's daughter.

"I hope you thought me an equally fortunate woman?"

"But was there any truth in it?"

"None whatever. But *did* you?"

"Did I what?"

"Think me an equally fortunate woman?"

I thought of trying the polished Man of the World again, and beginning with, "Far below your deserts, etc." But I had failed so before that I gave it up. I was very stupid not to answer naturally that indeed I did, and Nolly was the dearest and truest of friends, and would make the best of husbands. But an uncalled-for candour made my thoughts come to the surface.

"Much more fortunate," I said, "than on a pre——" and stuck in the middle of the word.

"Previous occasion," said Janey with decision, but then her decision seemed to fail her and she turned rather pale, I thought. "Oh dear," said she, "I do wish you wouldn't. It makes it so difficult, and it *doesn't* do any good." And she entrenched herself behind an illustrated paper.

I looked at the fire and forecast some more of my letter to Lossie. It employed, I am sorry to say, a most uncongenial simile, likening myself and Janey to two passengers in mid-channel pretending all was well with them, but saddened by a well-founded anxiety about the unexpired half of the passage. I was afraid that, if I renewed the conversation, Bony and Jeannie (who stood for Calais pier) would be too late to avert whatever the painful consequences anticipated were an analogue of. The image of Lossie looked at me in my mind, and said, "Don't be a nasty pig, Joe! Remember what I said before." And then I said to myself, "I'm sure I do love Janey quite half as much—a little more, perhaps—yes, decidedly a little more!" And then the image said, "It's more than that, Joe, and you know it, or you would do as I said and keep out of her way and make an end of it." And I think Joe No. 2 felt grateful to the image.

The analogy of Calais was a good one in one respect—we were very like the two passengers in our way of resorting to silence. We felt it was the best chance, and sat with our mental eyes shut, waiting for the sound of Jeannie or Bony on the stairs; just as they would have shut their practical ones and waited to hear that the harbour lights were in view. No voice of relief came and I could stand it no longer. I burst out suddenly, just as though the reciprocal consciousness and misgiving of the last two hours had been spoken conversation.

"You may say what you like, Janey, but you know it *wasn't* to carry away my poor old Dad's whiskey-bottle that I wanted you for my wife." She turned a little paler and said, "But I *said* nothing!" "No," said I, "but I heard you think it was, and I can't bear that you should think so." She turned paler still.

"Oh, how much better to let bygones be bygones!" She appealed to me beseechingly.

"They shall directly. But I *must* make you *know* that it wasn't."

"I do know it. I do believe it—indeed I do! You don't suppose it was *that* that made me——"

"Well, yes—I did! I thought it was—*partly,* at least. Of course I thought *most* of it was something else."

"It *was* something else," and Janey went very white indeed. "It was that you were so very fond of Lucilla Desprez. Let me go," for she was making for the door.

"But I was very—*very* fond of you." Janey shook her head slowly, and smiled.

"And you were very—very—*very* fond of Mrs. Desprez," said she. "It was three verys to my two. Much better let the bygones begin to be bygones, Mr. Vance."

"I can't—I won't!" I cried. "Oh, Janey—dearest Janey—what *could* I say without an untruth?"

"Nothing! It was as it was. But it is a woman's way to ask what she feels prepared to give, and I——"

I caught her in my arms and burst into a passionate entreaty to her to forgive me and take me back. Whatever else was true I said it was true that I loved her better than any other woman I could possibly marry. "Recollect," I said, "that if you turn me away again it is to no happiness elsewhere—only a black, dry fruitless world—and we may meet again in the desert, as we have met to-day, each wandering about alone." She did not shrink from me, but was as white as a sheet. I caught her up closer; I could feel how her heart beat, and still she did not shrink. But passionately as I spoke and felt, one of my inner selves was still speculating on how the other would finish that letter to Lossie; while the other was dimly conscious of an outside satisfaction, to come hereafter, at the happiness Lossie would have in reading it. I doubt this being the least intelligible to any one else—but then I am not writing any one else's life.

Janey showed no reaction against a *status-quo* that was distinctly founded on the school of Bony and Jeannie, until a footstep, or four footsteps, came on the stairs, and the anxious parents entered full of the frightful symptoms Baby was showing. It was Calais harbour too late. But they were too preoccupied to notice our preoccupation; and that pending the arrival of a General Practitioner, we discussed Gastro-Enteritis, Bubonic Plague, and so forth in an absent manner that scarcely rose to the importance of the occasion. After a verdict of wind, when the doctor had departed, execrating one general practice, to wit, that of going into panics about nothing, I went away with Bony for a final smoke. Just as we were settling down we heard a great laughing and talking in a remote upper region.

"I say," said Bony, "that won't do, they'll wake Baby! I wonder what all the rumpus is about, though," and he put the door on the jar to listen through it.

"I know what it is about," I said. Bony turned sharply round and looked full at me.

"No?" said he—and no print could express the *ore rotundo* character of the word. "*No?* You *don't* mean that?"

"Yes, I do, old chap."

"Well," said he, "I *am* glad!" He said this three times at least before enquiring, "How did you manage it, old fellow?" and then added, "I expect you took a leaf out of *my* book." I was not prepared to deny this.

I walked home through a mild early Spring night, happier than I had been for a long time, and wondering at the few words that had been spent on the whole of this transaction. I arranged comment on this for my letter to Lossie.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BUT HE DIDN'T WRITE THE LETTER TO LOSSIE. MR. VANCE'S DISGUST AT THE RECRUDESCENCE OF THE WIDOW. HOW HE TOLD DR. THORPE, AND THERE WAS SOMETHING AFTER ALL! BUT JEANNIE WILL PROVIDE FOR NOLLY. JOE'S WANT OF LITERARY SKILL JERKS HIS TALE OUT OF GEAR.

I WAS far too sleepy when I reached home even to write the letter to Lossie. Nevertheless, I was up and had breakfasted before my Father appeared, and had gone straight away to Chelsea. There I found Janey reading letters. "Back again so soon?" said she. "Yes," said I, "come to see you don't change your mind."

"How do you know anything about my mind? I never said *anything*. Come now, Master Joseph!" This had been picked up from Pheener during our previous engagement.

"*That* doesn't matter! Least said soonest mended, Miss Janey." From which it may be inferred that the stage directions of this little drama had been fully complied with, and that they were such as to leave no doubt of the sentiments of the performers.

"I couldn't find it in my heart to go all through two years ago again," said she. "I daresay I ought to have done it. But I was so lonesome after, that I couldn't screw myself up to doing it again. You can't have had any breakfast, it's so early?"

"Yes, I have, but I can manage some more." For I had run away in a hurry, not feeling quite certain it hadn't all been a dream. I checked Joe No. 2 for remarking that though I had arranged my letter to Lossie, I wasn't writing it. And when Mr. and Mrs. Macallister appeared they found Miss Spencer pouring out Mr. Vance's coffee! "Well," said Jeannie, "you do look like a comfortable couple." And I suppose ticked off one more to her score of successes.

I wanted to tell my Daddy (as well as to write my letter), so I went back again after just seeing Janey to some friends at Cadogan Gardens. On the way we just turned into the Hospital Gardens out of Queen's Road, and just sat down a few minutes in the Avenue. A few quarters of an hour would have been more accurate. When they were over I saw Janey to her friends, who lived at a house inside a Square. I went there six months ago, and it was gone. And the Chelsea of '64 had gone too, and some rare old slums had gone with it. And some rare new slums have taken their place, in which I am told the servants sleep in the bath, to use no bolder expression. This is neither here nor there.

After just waiting a minute or two to shake hands with Mrs. Something, Janey's friend, I had to make a bolt unexplained; and was so late that I only just arrived in time to catch my Father returning to the works, having finished lunch.

"Well, Nipper," was his greeting, "what's the news of Pimpleses grandchild? What did Pimples drink his health in?" He then went on to recall with pleasure untoward incidents that might happen at Christenings, greatly to the satisfaction of outsiders not in sympathy with any religious body. "You mustn't jolt 'em over the font," said he, "or there's no knowin'! I heard tell they jolted your elder sister Elizabeth that died in teething. I wasn't there myself. Your Mother told me." And my Father paused and became thoughtful. Poor old Dad!

"You're not asking so many questions as you might, Daddy," said I. He pondered a little to find a new question, and decided on asking who were the Godfathers and Godmother of Master Archie. It appeared to occur to him as singular and rather scandalous that this lady and these gentlemen were not joined in lawful wedlock, and that a good opportunity for making them respectable had been lost. "They might have put the halter over them then and there," said he, evidently confusing between the stable and the fane. I did not stop to clear this up, but again urged further enquiries. He said he was no good at guessing conundrums, and gave it up. Cook was sharper, for coming in at this moment with my lunch, she caught his last words and exclaimed,—"Law, Master, can't you see? It's a young lady?" And I admitted that this was the case.

"Well done the Nipper!" And my Father, who was just packing his scarf round his throat to face the outer air, undid it again to sit down and enjoy a good laugh over the event. "Well—done—the—Nipper! And this time it ain't a widder?"

"No, it certainly is *not*." But my Father fixed a suspicious eye on me, and shook the head of the unconvinced.

"The Nipper is at some game," said he. "He's gammoning his old Dad."

"No, Dad, honour bright! She isn't a widow, whatever she is." But the use of the expression honour bright convinced him that I was, as he put it, prequivocating.

"Spit it out, Nipper dear," said he. Whereon I admitted that though she wasn't a widow, she was the same young lady that hadn't been a widow before. It was a sad come-down. Cook, though, tried to put the best face she could on the matter, and said, well she declared now, think of that! But the gilt was evidently off her gingerbread. As for my Father, he really looked seriously concerned on my behalf, and strove to console me.

"Never mind, Joey dear! Cheer up! We'll put it she ain't a widder, and start fair accordin'. But you might have told me and Cook, instead of keeping of it back. Hay, Cook?" The extraction of this small amount of grievance made him happy and nasal, but Cook was evidently inwardly depressed, as I judged from the way in which she said, "And the partridge a-getting cold too," showing that she likened my engagement to a lunch that has been "kept warm," which is equivalent to being brought back cool. I felt sorry for Cook.

I have discovered by this time of my life that families are almost always disappointed with the Persons of their Choice, the immediate Choosers alone excepted. They may be generous and conceal it, or they may gather themselves up for a good collective tiger-spring, and go straight for the throat of the innocent intruder. But they will only have a true heartfelt welcome for him or her when they don't want the other party for themselves. Then they will acknowledge the kindness of Miss Jones in taking their little brother Cain or Judas or Caracalla off their hands, and will hope Miss Jones will have a steadying effect. Or *vice versa.* Knowing this, I was not surprised at my Dad's immediate dissatisfaction with the name of Jane Spencer, when we were first engaged. He had formed an ideal on my behalf and the name of it had several syllables, say Iphigenia in Tauris or Clytæmnestra. Having expressed his low opinion of Janey, by imputing essential widowhood to her, and the attributes of a laundress, I knew him too well to suppose he would retract. He would acknowledge that he had been drunk, with perfect candour, but he never admitted that he had made a mistake. So I was not astonished at his looking rather blank over the recrudescence of Janey—on the contrary, I thought it a concession on his part to surrender her widowhood and start fair.

But I was painfully conscious, when I broke my agreeable news to Dr. Thorpe, that there was *something* behind his otherwise most cordial reception of it—something that made me feel that I had been too confident. It was so slight that a moment after I thought that I must have been mistaken and the unpleasant feeling went off. But I felt it again when I told Nolly, who had come, as I did, on a usual Sunday. He put too much side on in his congratulations and spoke, I thought, with a certain amount of effort, and an artificially exhilarated tone. I suddenly recollected Bony's allegation about Nolly and Janey. There must have been something in it!

There could be no concealments between me and Dr. Thorpe. That would have been contrary to nature. So I spoke straight to him about it after Nolly had departed when we were together in the Library after lunch. "Why—there was *some*thing," said he, "but I don't know if one could fairly describe it as anything between Nolly and Miss Spencer; for Nolly made the mistake of not taking the lady into his confidence—not enough, that is. He spoke to her Father and asked his leave to speak to Janey—and her Father took upon himself to say she would be unpropitious. It struck me as an unusually rash act in Spencer to vouch for anything! But I suppose he had his reasons. I could have understood his merely discouraging an engagement on the ground of the incautiousness of marriage. But he went further and took the responsibility of heading Nolly off altogether. Nolly couldn't very well run counter to his principal; so he kept away and consoled himself with cricket. This was more than six months ago."

"Do you know, Doctor, I can't suppose Janey ever knew anything about it—indeed, I'm sure she didn't, from a lot of things."

"Do you think she ought to be told, and given her choice?—all go back and make a fresh start? I shouldn't recommend it, even if you thought it would be easy to negotiate. I don't. Moreover, I suspect that her Father knew what he was about." I thought so too, as I knew how devoted she was to him.

I got an opportunity of sounding Mrs. Macallister as to how she came by her information about Nolly, as I was perfectly certain Janey was absolutely unconscious. But Jeannie was quite unable to quote any authorities—had only seen the parties together once. Was he very *empressé* in his manner? I asked.

"Spooney, do you mean? No—not particularly. But anybody could tell—any girl, I mean. The way he spoke of her as Miss Spencer, and kept at the other end of the room. Heaps of things! As for Janey, she's just a born goose with no eyes at all. Never sees anything."

"She knows nothing about it now?"

"Nothing whatever, and I shan't tell her. Oh yes! of course

I've talked to her about him—chaffed her a little—but she only said she wished he was a little more talkative. Please touch that bell near you, Mr. Vance. I want to know if Baby's asleep." Baby was, according to Nurse's testimony; and Jeannie resumed, looking thoughtfully at the fire:—

"There must be somebody now that would do nicely for your cousin——"

"He's not my cousin—he's no relation."

"Well! Your whatever he is! There now! I'd just thought of somebody, and you put her out of my head. Oh, I know!—Priscilla Middleton. Oh no—by-the-bye!—she's going to marry a man with a bottle nose and check trousers. What a silly I am! Well, but I'll tell you who there is—of course—there's Maisie Maxey—the very thing! Why, she's seen him already, at Lord's, and said how nice he looked in his flannels!"

"But that child! Come, I say, Mrs. Bony, draw it mild!"

"Child indeed! She's nearly seventeen, and he's twenty-seven. It's quite ideal." And Jeannie's beautiful face beamed with joy in the flicker of the firelight. And little did Mr. Prentice Maxey, her papa, and Lady Sarah Maxey, her mamma, dream of the snares that were being laid for their daughter by that pretty Engineer's wife Maisie was so thick with. It's so long ago now that I can't recall why I have an impression that these parents had misgivings over the acquaintances Miss Maisie had picked up. But I had one, and keep it still; and have now a version of it which murmurs that the Oliver Thorpes give themselves airs because Maisie Thorpe, the one that was so like her Aunt Lucilla, married her cousin the present Earl. However, this is antipication with a vengeance!—

Jeannie had an easy job this time. For really she contributed very little to the result. Beyond getting me to bring Nolly over one evening, and exposing him to the large blue eyes of the Earl's granddaughter, like a photographic sensitized surface, she hardly did a hand's turn. However, she was too honourable to make a parade of her achievement, and admitted that it was Maisie's own doing entirely. She described the position in terms that would have done honour to my Mother. "When a girl," said she, "jams her head down a man's throat, he naturally takes up the gauntlet!"

Nolly certainly took up the gauntlet, and the tournament came off about two years later at St. George's, Hanover Square. The girl's Mother made a great fight, on social grounds, no one of her family having ever fallen so low as a Solicitor. But she was outflanked and routed by the Earl, her father, on whom it suddenly dawned that Oliver Thorpe was the son of *the* Dr. Thorpe, whereupon he descended on Poplar Villa one day, to the Doctor's surprise, to express the unbounded satisfaction that he felt at his granddaughter marrying the son of so illustrious a man. He was a Biological or Ethnological or Psychological Earl—I really forget which!

Nolly was therefore married about twelve months after Janey and myself. His wife is living still, as I happen to know. I saw her name recently in the *Morning Post,* and learned that she was a Primrose Dame. Perhaps if they ever speculate about me, they wonder if I am still in Brazil, or what has become of me; strange, isn't it, if this should be true?—seeing what narrative my last paragraph was the end of. If it isn't true, something equally strange is. For, consider the meaning of thirty years!

When I am writing of the past, it comes back so vividly, each recovered incident constantly supplying recollection of something else, that I can almost hear the voices that even now, some of them, may sometimes speak of me. I can see Jeannie's glorious auburn hair glowing in the firelight, as she hatches her little scheme for entrapping Nolly and the Primrose Dame above mentioned! I can hear muffled cab-wheels on the snow outside, and Jeannie says, "That's Janey—I was afraid she wouldn't come." And then I meet Janey in the passage, coming warm and living out of the snow, and shaking it off her sealskin, and in want of half-a-crown for the Hansom—

And I can almost hear the words! And then it all dies away and I am alone in —— St., Bloomsbury, on a blank and featureless Saturday night—not even a thick fog, only a thin one—with a piano-organ playing the tune I know as Carmen in this street, and a band of a harp and cornet at the George the Fourth round the corner. The cornet plays a note at a time, with Geological periods between, and I discern that this style lends itself to Patriotic music, and am stirred accordingly. But I shall be glad when Midnight comes and closes George, and scatters the Band as though it was marauders, and goes away refreshed by a gratuitous half-pint George has bestowed upon it.

And then I sit and think of that dear wife of mine that I lost a quarter of a century ago—I think of the happy weeks we passed after our happy wedding, in the Summer of '64, chiefly at old French towns, on the coast or inland; of happy wanderings on the endless sands, and wallowing in them in the sun after stopping much too long in the water; of equally happy tramps or rides through endless avenues of stripped tree-trunks, and round interminable obsolete fortifications where my imagination heard the Macallister Repeater destroying fathers of families at distances undreamed of by the men who built them. And as something always stands out clear, the most vivid thing of all is one particular rosy fat fishwife, and the sweet candour with which she asked when Janey expected her *fils?* No such party was in sight, but Marie Favre, or whatever her name was, took him for granted, sex and all—

And then I recollect that it was after a long, long talk on the sands, that we chatted with Madame Favre. The tide was flowing and made us jump up and go higher at intervals, but we had time for half of our talk before we were driven up into a pleasant smell of crab-shells baking in the sun, and unto crackly colourless dead seaweed and flotsam and jetsam, where we had the other half. And the subject of all this talk was—Lossie!

For we very often talked of Lossie. And of this I am certain, —that this dear wife of mine, whom I lost so long ago, was the only creature in this mortal world to whom I ever spoke on the subject without reserve. To Lossie I wrote (without reserve) on every other subject. To her father I never spoke directly at all, although each of us knew the other saw into his mind. But even though I write this record now, as one who strives to show his whole soul faithfully and truly, and does it with full deliberation and forethought as a kind of self-imposed exercise that, while it tries him, helps him on in facing the lonely time, yet I shall never succeed in being one-half as intelligible to *you* (assuming your existence), as I was to Janey that morning on the beach at Fécamp. If I could do that, I believe I should have your pity and sympathy, as I had hers.

"But, Jack darling," she had said,—we called each other Jack and Jill, she having christened me Jack,—"what a goose you were not to say, 'Miss Lucilla dear,' or whatever you called her, 'I'm so fond of you that if ever I lose you I shall go mad or die,' or something of that sort! Just think how happy you might have been! It *does* seem *such* a pity."

"Because I didn't know it myself. If you were to pull all my hair out by the roots——"

"Am I pulling too hard?"

"No, darling, pull away—it's merely an illustration! If you were to pull it all out by the roots, and scratch my eyes out, I couldn't say otherwise. I no more knew what a thunderbolt there was in the bush a minute before Dr. Thorpe spoke of her engagement to me at Oxford than a babe unborn."

"Thunderbolts don't live in bushes—never mind! But do tell me, Jacky darling, quite seriously what you suppose would have happened—if for instance it had turned out after the thunderbolt came out of the bush, that Dr. Thorpe didn't mean engaged to be married, but engaged—say—as leading lady at the Haymarket. Surely you would have known what was wrong then?"

"Of course I should, dearest Jilly! And I should have gone straight to Lossie, and taken her into my confidence."

"And what do you suppose she would have done—or said?"

"I know exactly. She would have pushed her loose hair back and looked at me with her eyelids just dropped a little and her mouth open—not like the hippopotamus at the Zoo—but her lips just parted."

"And she would have said?"

"She would have said quite suddenly, 'Oh, you dear silly boy, do you suppose you are the only little brother that ever was sorry to lose his big sister?' And I should no more have known how to explain than the man in the moon."

"Is he such a bad hand at an explanation? But she would have understood at once. All women do——"

"She wouldn't have, dearest Jill. She would have supposed I was asking for something she could not give, and I should only have been asking to keep what I had got."

"And keeping what you had got was incompatible with Lucilla Thorpe marrying anybody else?" Whereon Joey No. 2, in my inner consciousness, where he had been getting restive, became riotous and shouted, "It was—you know it was! Don't be a hypocrite and deny it." So I said feebly, "I'm afraid that was the case."

"Very well, then, Master Jack," said Janey, "now we come to the point. (Be quiet—it's only a sandhopper!) Now we come to the point. You expected everything to remain *in statu quo* till you woke up. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes—I think it might be truer to say I didn't expect it not to remain so. But we won't quarrel about a phrase. Perhaps I had sometimes been just conscious enough of an idea that Lossie might marry knocking at the door of my mind, to shut the door in its face. But when I shut the door I never looked out of the window to see who knocked."

"You dear self-deceiving Jack! You never looked out because you knew what you would see." And Joe No. 2, whose eye was fixed on me as a cat's on a mouse, and to whom I knew I should fall a prey, said, "Now, Joe Vance, what do you make of *that?*"

I could make nothing against the two of them, so I gave it up. Also at this moment a long crested wave rose out of the blue far away, and the sea-birds must have told it that the tide was coming in very slowly at Fécamp, for it came steadily on to the shore, pooh-poohing the little presumptuous splashes and ripples that had been making believe in the sunshine, and poured its two miles of crest on the sheet of glass before it, and rushed straight over it with a musical roar. And when it retired after charging up the sloping sands at the population, it did so with every reason to be proud of its success in wetting fugitives to the skin. And as soon as they were audible again, the gulls could be heard egging on another, even bigger, to go and do likewise.

Janey and I escaped with very small casualties, and retired to a plateau of little clear pebbles, all one bigness. I can remember running my hands through them as we settled down.

"What were we talking of—oh! Lossie Desprez. Well, Jacky dearest, whatever you may say to the contrary, I cannot help thinking something *might* have been done. If you had only sounded a note of warning, who knows but what she would never have fallen in love with Sir Hugh. And then think how jolly it might have been!" I was just going to assent to this, when I perceived that Joe No. 2 was sneering cynically, and this suggested another view of the case.

"But, Jill darling—stop a minute! If it had come out like that, I should never have been sitting here with you—that would never do at all!"

"No," said Janey, thoughtfully, "it's a bad fix! But then," she added, as one on whom a light breaks, "don't you see? I shouldn't have been in it at all! You would have been nothing to me but Miss Lossie's schoolboy that I could only just recollect."

"I don't look with satisfaction at would-have-beening anything of the sort," said I.—"Well," said Janey, "I don't subscribe to the idea exactly, but I was struck by that loophole and grasped at it."

"And then you to sniff at thunderbolts and bushes! I'm glad we haven't got to translate our conversation to that nice *poissonnière* up there that's looking at us in such a motherly way. Yow!—Here's another wave!"

And our next rush brought us up to the zone of dried crabshells and big stones, where one sits down cautiously for a variety of reasons. And there was Marie Favre aforesaid, and in a very few minutes we knew the names of all her family.

And I lay down my pen, and the beach and the blue sea have vanished. I am back again, and the organ has played through all its tunes and has come round to Carmen once more; when it appears to be suddenly struck with a sense of tautology, and refusing a *da capo* abruptly decamps into the night. I wish it would go on, for even Carmen was company. I would have given it a penny if it had been within range. But it was too far off, and all the noises have gone. No! There is a feeble flageolet in the back street, which comes out into the silence now there is nothing to drown it. I have got the penny. I have nerved myself to part with it. I know the very old man who plays that flageolet, and I will interrupt 'Life let us cherish,' which is his tune, to give him that penny, and I will take a little walk round to make myself sleep when I return, and perhaps I shall see a drunken man being taken to the station. And then I will come back and think more over the old time, until sleep comes and allows me to go back into the past and live it through again without a tear. I much prefer the sleeping dream to the waking one. Nothing in one's head splits, and one can speak without choking.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AND, AFTER ALL, LOSSIE'S LETTER PASSED HER IN MID-OCEAN! OF HOW JOE AND JANEY READ HIS FATHER'S LETTER AT POPLAR VILLA, AND HOW LOSSIE CAME UNEXPECTEDLY ON TWO HAPPY LOVERS IN THE TWILIGHT. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ELDEST MISS FLOWERDEW! DR. THORPE JOINS THEM; BUT HOW ABOUT HIS HEART? HOW JOE AND JANEY WERE MARRIED. BUT NO ONE CAN PLAY JANEY'S PIANO NOW.

It is very fortunate that I never took it into my head to be an Author. What a nice hash I should have made of it!

For see what I have done! Here, in what I think of to myself as a consecutive narrative, I have contrived to plunge into my honeymoon before I was married! Had I really put my pen down before it led me into this excursion (just at the time they closed the "George" public) I should have gone on reasonably and told the things that came about before my marriage in the summer. They belong to an intensely happy passage in my life—although I absolutely despair of explaining (to any one but myself) the way in which one of them contributed to that happiness. I am speaking of Lossie's return to England.

I fancy I have indicated that this was expected, but very likely not. We were all expecting her some time or other, but I remember distinctly that no time was settled, when the *rapprochement* took place between Janey and myself, as narrated in the last chapter. Nevertheless, my letters had kept Lossie *au fait* of everything, and the long letter I wrote to her a day or two after my reconciliation interview with Janey would have brought her information up to date, had it reached her. It was an interesting letter, giving every detail, and had in addition a sort of commentary, written in red ink by Janey; a rubric—part information, part contradiction of my narrative. I can recollect buying a little bottle of red ink, at Janey's request, and how the sealing-wax chipped off the cork and went on the carpet, and had to be swept up. This shows (me) it was at Hampstead that I gave her my letter to read, as in no other house I frequented at the time was the standard of tidiness so high. But this letter passed Lossie at some unsuspected point in the Red Sea or Persian Gulf, and was opened and read by the General at about the time of the little incident which will inaugurate a new quire of foolscap (here in Bloomsbury, thirty years later), if I am detained in this world long enough to complete and despatch an article on cantilever bridge-building, which I have promised the printer early to-morrow morning.

This little incident was a trifle perhaps in itself, and might be given in a dozen words thus: Lossie came home sooner than was expected, and took Janey and me by surprise. But it was a sort of epoch-making trifle, and stands out clear in my memory of unforgotten things.

Lossie, with her little boy, about a year and a half old now, was due at Marseilles early in April. But there came bad storms and a cold snap, and a delay to the boat; not quite without anxiety to us at home. A welcome telegram dissipated this, but ended "shall not come just yet—too cold." For the rough weather and the change of climate had been trying, and the letter that followed seemed to point to an anchorage in the Riviera until a little real warmth came. I suppose we in England were misled by our huge fires and thick greatcoats in a murderous east wind, or else Lossie was made too confident by a sudden Mediterranean sun, for she and the babies and an ayah and a French maid came quite a week earlier than our earliest expectation, having through some postal delay overtaken their own premonitory letter.

Janey and I were at Poplar Villa. We were consoling the Doctor on alternate days with Nolly. He had been very anxious about Lossie all by herself on the journey, although he had been making believe that he was quite at ease. So Nolly and I arranged that he should never be left alone in the evening, or as little as possible. I frequently borrowed Janey, greatly to the Doctor's satisfaction; as he was as good as in love with her, to use his own phrase. Nolly would gladly have negotiated a loan of Miss Maxey, on the alternate evenings; but this was in the days before the Earl had realized Nolly's parentage, and the battle was still raging over the adaptability of Solicitors to Earl's Nests. And Maisie would hardly have been the same as Janey in any case. The Doctor liked her very well afterwards, but looked on her as a kissable version of a china shepherdess.

On this occasion Janey and I chartered a Hansom all the way from Hampstead. The wind had fallen and we were having one of those early spring days the east wind sometimes leaves as a compensating legacy to the Londoner—one of those days that slip in unnoticed between the death of Eurus and the birth of Zephyrus or Auster; whichever it is that comes to wet us through after our shiverings!

"If this goes on, Joe," said Janey to me, as we got out of our cab—she had not at that time christened me Jacky—"if this goes on we shall have all the trees out in a month."

"Yes," I said, "and then all the blossoms, and then skating, and everything killed!"

"Peter Grievous!" said Janey, laconically. "Here's my bag. Carry it in. No—here's Sam. Put it up in my room, Sam, please! Is the Doctor back?"

No—he wasn't. He and Professor Absalom had gone for a walk. We never-minded, and went into the Library, having acquiesced in tea, though late—I had a letter I wanted to show Janey, and I had been saving it up till we got a little peace and quiet. We got both in the Library, away from the noise of traffic, with the red sunset streaming in that showed that whatever it was now, it meant to rain to-morrow. "No," said Janey, "I shan't take my bonnet off till I've had my tea; so you'll have to put up with it, Master Joseph. Where's the letter?—No, tea first, letter after—because then we shall really get a little peace and quiet!" Anybody would have thought to hear the way we cherished the expression, that riding through a well-policed district in a well-bred Hansom was the Battle of Prague, or the Walpurgisnacht, or a Typhoon. Even the tranquillity of tea in the Library alone didn't come up to our ideal, and it was only when everything had been taken away that Janey decided the letter might be considered. But we would not have the lamp, and there would be plenty of light near the window for ever so long yet. We would sit on the ottoman, towards the light, and turn the letter back, like that, and should do capitally.

The letter was from my Father—but in his wife's handwriting, from his dictation. It was written from a farmhouse in Worcestershire to which he and Pheener had gone for their honeymoon, or part of it. It was Pheener's ancestral home. My Father had insisted on going there, and being properly introduced to his wife's family. I think he was haunted with an idea that if he did not they would come up to town looking like illustrations to Thomson's Seasons or the Vicar of Wakefield, and would be sure to abase themselves and treat him respectfully. This was more than he could bear. "It's bad enough," he said to me, once, "to be touched people's hats to when they're expectin' an early settlement. But when it comes to bein' a Squire—! I don't care a dam twopence about the whole turn-out, Beadles, stocks and all, myself. So what I say is, make it easy accordin'." His experiences had been almost exclusively London and Suburban, and his ideas of rural life might perhaps have been traced to playhouses in his early youth. I fancy I derived from him an idea of my own boyhood—that all countryfolk were either Good or Villains. This hard and fast classification must have come from some penny-gaff melodrama. I have not got the letter now—but I can remember enough of it to show that my Father's early faith in bucolic virtue had received a shock.

It began with an assurance that "my dissolute parent" continued sober, and went on to say that "the deserving young woman who had undertaken to 'act as a Man You Ensis to the above' was acquitting herself well in the situation to which it had pleased God to call her."

"Oh, I see!" said Janey. "Amanuensis, of course! I couldn't make out what he meant. I suppose he said it a syllable at a time, and she wrote it down."

"That was it. He knows the word from Hickman. He's rather fond of long words now and then—regards them as 'andy when parties are inquisitive. He relies on words he doesn't know the meaning of, as a means of withholding information."

"I see—but it's risky. Let's have more of the letter. Whatever does he mean by what comes next? 'I am particularly well pleased, myself, and Mrs. V. she shares our sentiments, as in duty bound.' What does he mean by our? Is it like Royalty?"

"Let's have a look—stop a bit! I see now—but I'm glad Violet isn't here."

Janey examined the text again, and broke into a laugh; she saw too! "He really is too ridiculous for anything," she said. And we went on deciphering the letter in the growing darkness. It dwelt on the self-denying character of Pheener's guardianship of the whiskey-bottle, in view of the fact that consistency dictated total abstinence. "Not a nip for her poor self!" said the letter. "Otherwise contrairiness," meaning thereby that nips and supervision would be inconsistent. It then described the depraved condition of the rural population. "As this leaves me at present the population is drunk." The Parson and the Doctor seemed sober, but this he ascribed to successful dissimulation, the result of better training. Owing chiefly to the Parson the morality of the villagers was low. "The offsprings are fat but illegitimate, having white hair and blue eyes—and as red as lobsters." At this point Janey said I wasn't to put my eyes out any longer—I suggested ringing for the lamp. But sitting in the half-dark, looking out at a new moon and an evening star, was too nice to spoil, so we put the letter away and enjoyed the peace and quiet. If we hadn't got both now we were hard to satisfy. However, there is a serpent in every Eden, and in this one it was my ridiculous consciousness.

"What nonsense, you silly old Joe," said Janey. "If any one does come into the room, what does it matter? It isn't as if people were born yesterday! I was just enjoying the light so, and you spoiled it all by jumping up. It isn't anybody!"

Wasn't it? Well, at any rate, I wasn't responsible now, if anybody did come in. So I readjusted the *status-quo* and went on helping to enjoy the light. It faded, as its way is, and then we enjoyed the twilight.

I don't precisely know how it happened. There may have been some trace of obstinacy on my part; aware of a newcomer in the room, but reluctant to be convicted again of ridiculous consciousness; and hence the development of events. Of this I am certain, that neither Janey nor I stirred a finger or spoke a word until we were startled by a hand that came round the neck of each of us and a voice that said, "Oh, *do* say it's Grizzle!" And it was Lossie.

It was actually Lossie herself! If she wasn't absolutely and precisely the same Lossie that went away through the door she had just come in at, four years ago, she was near enough—nearer far than I had ever hoped. For I had conjured up many images of altered Lossies. There were two in particular I rather shuddered to anticipate; a fat overpowering Lossie with a redundant dictatorial manner, and a flavour of Commanders-in-chief and Durbars, and a dried Lossie, a slice of human toast as it were, incapable of doing anything for itself and peevish with the servants, but hung all over with very large diamonds which had belonged to Moguls. In those days some of us still formed our ideas of India from the "Surgeon's Daughter" and Macaulay's "Lord Clive and Warren Hastings," helped a little by Thackeray, and in my case a dash of a Lascar who swept a crossing somewhere near Golden Square.

But this newcomer who broke into our peace and quiet was no distempered imagination of mine, but a Lossie so like herself, at any rate in a half-dark room, that the four years seemed to have vanished. She brought with her problems that would hardly wait till after an extravagant outburst of welcome for solution. An exact verbal record of what followed may explain itself. Let it try.

"Well, but then it really *is* Grizzle, after all! You foolish boy, why couldn't you say so?"

"But—how did you get upstairs?" This was Janey, but she had to wait. "Of course it is," I said. "But who ever said it wasn't?"

"Nobody said it wasn't, Joe dear. But you never said *who* it was. Wait till you see your own letter!"

"But how *did* you get upstairs?" said Janey, returning to the charge.

"Anyhow, it is you, Grizzle dear—and I am so delighted I can't tell you. But when did it come all right? I *am* in such a bewilderment—I can't make head or tail of it. Your letter, dear old Joe!—all about *her,* and *she,* and how was I to tell?"

"But we never heard any cab," said Janey again. But Lossie was much too keen after her own mystification to attend to Janey's. And Janey knew she was herself, so that no explanation seemed necessary. A *fait-accompli* has leisure to wait for an official *raison-d'être.* But the cab, or its absence, called aloud for elucidation, and I thought it shorter to take Janey's part. Whereon Lossie made concession—but in a parenthesis:—

"(Because we had a stupid cabman, and his wheel came off—at least it would have, only a policeman told him. It's all right! Anne and Sam have gone out to see to it. We were all but here.) You know, dear Joe, for anything there was in your letter, it might have been the eldest Miss Flowerdew." This speech contained (to me, who knew the ground) an aspersion on this young lady—a hint that she was a monument of uncoveted singleness. I waived the eldest Miss Flowerdew, and kept to the point.

"But Janey wrote a red-ink letter all over mine, Loss. And signed her name to it. Yours very affectionately, Jane Spencer. Didn't you, Janey dear?"

"Of course, Joe! And there was no room. And you said it didn't matter if I couldn't get the *r* in, because Lossie Desprez would be sharp enough to guess."

"Red ink!" exclaimed Lossie. But sounds without arrested explanation: one sound of a small, very voluble boy, talking to a Hindoo ayah in her own language; another of an indignant and injured baby, who, however, accepted a composition; others of hirelings who were being exhorted to take care of the lamp whatever they did, and to be very careful of the walls. They and their hoarseness, and their flavour, were shut out, and the others let in. But the babies were (unjustly, it seemed to me) classified as unfit for society owing to fatigue. The little boy said to me, "You're not grandpapa," which seemed to me reasonable. I thought it a good remark, but Lossie condemned it as below par, saying I had no idea how shrewd and apposite her son's remarks were when he wasn't half asleep. Both he and Baby were too sleepy to be countenanced, and their removal was just giving an opening for renewed elucidations, when Lossie started up, crying out that there was darling Papa—she knew his step—and ran downstairs to meet him. I did not immediately follow.

I don't know what other people's experience is, but I myself have never known a home-coming that was not spoiled—or the edge taken off it—by the reluctance of cabmen, or intruders whom they aid and abet, to accept any sum of money whatever for their services, and to go away without a grievance. I am sure the daughters of the horse-leech (though it is difficult to imagine them being required to go more than four miles an hour or lending a 'and up with anything too heavy for you) would not have been so exacting as this class of persons. Anyhow, poor Lossie's long-looked-forward-to hug of her father was not enjoyed as thoroughly as it might have been. She ran out into the front garden to meet him, and as a background was aware of two injured, but of course civil and sober, instances of neglect of washing, who were begging pardon, but it was rather hard. They were surprised and hurt that a world they had hitherto had confidence in should offer them eightpence for carryin' all them boxes from over agin' the Robin 'Ood Tavern and then upstairs. The job was worth 'arf-a-crown. And the sum in their outstretched hands, reminding one of pictures of St. Francis, was eighteenpence! There was nothing for it but largesse—and then Lossie and the Doctor got away and escaped into the house.

"Botheration take the Men," said Lossie. "Why didn't Anne give them heaps of money and get them out of the way?"

"They would only have asked for more, dear," said the Doctor. "It's their nature to.—No, dear! I'm all right!" Because he had turned pale, and drawn in his breath sharply; and if he had not answered the question before it became words, Lossie would have asked what the matter was. How very odd that I remember this now, and it was forgotten in a moment at the time! "I've had a long walk with the Professor," said he, "and I didn't expect you, don't you see?"

Then we went in steadily for a good explanation. "I never got any red ink, Joe," said Lossie, sitting on her father's knee like a little girl, and caressing his head. "Only a stupid little letter to Marseilles, saying I should see her so soon myself you wouldn't write anything more. How was I to know who *her* was? It might have been altogether a new her. But it isn't, and I'm so glad!" And Lossie came off her father's knee expressly to kiss Janey again, and then went back.

It was all clear enough now. Lossie had never had a hint of the renewed treaty—as we should have seen she couldn't had we thought it out. But one gets very foolish over letter-dates. She had seen from my Marseilles letter that there was a *her* of importance who had slipped into my life; and had come on, perhaps all the quicker. All had gone well till about a hundred yards from the gate, when the cab-wheel incident occurred. Impatience was too strong to be endured, and Lossie forsook the cab and her offspring to run on to the house and get assistance. Rapid explanations despatched Anne and Sam to the rescue of the cab, and Lossie was left confronted with a new girl—one born yesterday, as it were! The new girl could testify that Dr. Thorpe had gone for a walk with a Professor, that Mr. Joseph Thorpe was in Somersetshire, but that the other Mr. Joseph was in the Library with his cousin. This last needless complication was only owing to the new girl's intense delicacy, and desire not to create gossip! She was a very nice new girl, I'm sure almost too nice for this rough and wicked world! But no! She didn't know the cousin's name.

"So then, Master Joe," said Lossie, "I only waited long enough to find that there was a letter from Hugh—here it is with *all right* written outside—and then I came up as quietly as I could and sneaked into the room. And I couldn't see who it was till I looked round Grizzle's bonnet. And I *was* so glad!"

"I should have heard you coming, dear Mrs. Despr—well, Lossie then! Only for my bonnet." And Janey removes that obstruction and stands, half-leaning on the table, swinging it by the ribbons. And the new girl brings the lights.

And as I sit here, thirty years later, I can see them still—I have only to close my eyes on my new quire of foolscap, and there is the Doctor in his writing-chair of old days, beaming with happiness and all the colour back in his cheeks again—of course it was only the excitement, or at that time we thought so. And there is Lossie, incredibly like herself, running her fingers through his hair, and patting and petting his cheeks. And there is Janey, who cannot take her eyes off Lossie, whom every new passage of my old story has made more and more a wonder to her. And there am I, quite a third person to my now self, a young man who gets happier and happier at every visible interchange, every cross-current of word or feeling, that passes between the two women whom he does not speak of to himself as his old love and his new—but that is the right language for the passer-by, nevertheless. Remember that it is my own life I am writing, and that I cannot analyze myself as other than I was. I daresay it was all wrong. But if Lossie, who is still living (as I have said before), could come to me now, my first word to her would be about Janey.

We were married about eight weeks after Lossie's return and went away to Normandy. I am not so clear about any part of that eight weeks as I am about the foregoing. Salient important facts are: that Lossie was just in time to help Janey with her *things;* that vain attempts were made by legal minds to engineer a marriage settlement so as to procure a broil; that Violet, though she did not refuse to come to our wedding at the church in Essex Street, High Holborn—(Janey was a Unitarian if she was anything, and what I was Heaven only knows!), nevertheless made a merit of doing so, and I know attended a service at Margaret Street, Regent Street, in the afternoon to get assoilzied, as it were. Also that she was very anxious to give us a wedding present that would be really useful, which was not intended as an insinuation that Janey was unsuited for decoration, but was akin to it, and showed that her mind was classifying us involuntarily. We were people of our sort—she was a person of hers. It was so true too, when you come to think of it! A good many of our friends were needlessly desirous of giving us really serviceable things, and avoiding gewgaws and fal-lals, but I fancy a change of motive came into that movement of our Wedding March when Janey's Streatham aunt wanted to give something really useful, and spend say twenty pounds; and Janey begged for twenty silk umbrellas, which would last her lifetime, and keep for ever in those nice shiny oilskins. Our great present was Janey's father's splendid Broadwood grand. "And there!" said she, "I can only play tunes on it."

No one can play tunes on it now; nor could it be put in order again after all these years in a Pantechnicon—so they tell me.

I wonder whether that is true, or whether it is only that if old works could be replaced no one would ever want new cases. I always think the reverse is true of me; and that if I could get a new case, the old works would do as they stand.

When I went to choose out a few oddments from that Pantechnicon on my return from Brazil, I found the same guardian in charge that had received them twenty years ago. He was just married when I went—so he had told me. This time, he had been married again, fifteen years. He was looking forward to the wedding of the first wife's son, a good-looking young man; on the top of whom, when his father pointed him out to me, was an escritoire weighing two or three hundredweight, which he seemed to make light of. "That boy's a good boy," said his father, "but you might say he killed his mother, in startin' himself." And all that boy's life I had been in Brazil. Was it really as long as that! Then his father added, "That was his mother you knew"—although of course I didn't, and he knew I didn't; but there was a little link with the past, and he claimed it. I was not unfeeling enough to contradict him. I chose out some small article from among my leavings and, crossing it off the list, asked his father to give it to him as a wedding present. I thought Janey would like me to.

But how come I to have wandered away to the Pantechnicon? I remember. It was the Broadwood. Well!—that Piano, and all the things they gave us, and all the things we bought, went as appointed to our house that was to be, in Cheyne Row, Chelsea. But I am using the word "things" in the Dictionary sense, not in its more reserved and exalted one. In that sense, Janey's "things" that Lossie helped her to buy, mostly travelled out to Normandy with us, and were a great satisfaction to the Douane, so heavily was it tipped to avoid turning them all out, and rumpling them, and creasing them, and suspecting them to be lined with tobacco. "I know they'll spoil that fichu we were so long choosing," said Janey. And I can't expect you to understand why "we" gave me so much pleasure.

But it did! As I think now of that two months before my wedding, and how Lossie threw herself into all our arrangements, and how Janey encouraged her to do so, it presents itself to me as one of the happiest times of my life. If I put my writing aside now and smoke a pipe before I go to bed I shall think of nothing else. It has quite cancelled the cantilevers, which are in the printer's hands by this time.

Yes! that was thirty years ago. And what a narrow escape I had had of having all my affection for Lossie turned to gall and wormwood. It might have been, but for her and her husband, and the way they could understand a boy just out of his teens. It never has been, for all that has come to pass since, and never will be now, in the short spell that has still to be. But I wish what has come to pass could have been otherwise.

CHAPTER XXXV

OF THE NEW FACTORY IN CHELSEA. OF THE BACKSLIDING OF OLD MR. VANCE. HOW JOE DREAMED A STRANGE DREAM, AND ITS INTERRUPTION. OF THE GREAT FIRE, AND HOW MR. VANCE WAS RESCUED, BUT SPRAINED. SO FAR AS CAN BE ASCERTAINED, FULLY COVERED BY INSURANCE. AN OLD BURNED BOARD, WITH WRITING ON IT.

ON our return we settled at our house in Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Ve were very near the Macallisters, who were facing the river in n old house close to the old bridge beyond the Church. Bony and could walk over in half an hour to my Father's house at Clapam, behind which we were still carrying on the engineering usiness, although very much cramped for space. At this date he useful word ructions had not appeared in the language, so I resume the complications that occurred between the workmen of he two separate concerns were spoken of as dissensions or colsions, or rows or shindies, when they were discussed by the office r the workshop respectively. My Father never described difculties of this sort in detail; but, with a true instinct, based on ng experience and keen personal sympathy, went straight to the *era causa.* "Smith and Gilfillan," he would say, for instance, had both on 'em 'ad a drop, and was unaccommodatin'," or Phipps he's a peppery card, and when the worse it's trying to the emper." But he avoided secondary or apparent causes, as in the rst of these cases, in which the respective carmen in charge of e carts of Vance *père* and Vance *fils,* had contrived to get their ehicles locked in the yard entry because neither would wait until e other was clear, and both had been guilty of bad packing. We 'ad the best of it," said my Father. "My man he walked nto yours to the toon of forty pound odd; and yours, he only nashed a window frame or two. Fifteen shillins!" Both the indow frames and the piece of shafting that smashed it were ojecting unduly; but then the shafting formed part of a lathe arranted to make everything in the universe to within a twoousandth of an inch, while window frames went by the dozen, nd you put 'em down at so much.

However, this incident and many like it showed the necessity of new premises for one or both, and as my Father clung to the old place from association, it was decided that a new Engineering Works, superseding all previous undertakings, should be erected in Chelsea not far from the houses of the heads of the concern. "You see, Nipper dear," said he to me, "I can't be cut adrift from your Mother." And so closely did he adhere to this plan of life, that when I asked Pheener (as I prefer to go on calling her) when she was going to finish hanging the pictures in the drawing-room she replied that she had spoken to Mr. Vance, and thought he would prefer that they should remain as they were. "Because of Missis, you know, Master Joseph," added she, forgetful of a solemn promise to drop the "Master." I let it stand this time! Also I left unmolested against the wall the two "Proofs before Letters."

However, it was not until the third year of my marriage that the new Factory became a reality. This was the time of the zenith of my Father's prosperity. Had it not been for this, very likely the works in Chelsea would not have been on so grand a scale. But when your builder accepts all your directions, and carries them out free of charge, you are apt to run into extravagance, even if he is not constantly urging you on not to be stingyin' yourself down for the sake of a shillin' or so.

It is because this is only a domestic history, of indefinite purpose, that I do not enter at length into the details of the engineering business. The Spherical Engine came into my domestic record naturally; so did the Macallister Repeater. But the various devices of sawing, shaping, and planing machines for which we were known have nothing whatever to do with it. Therefore I omit a technical history whose purpose would be even more indefinite, and for doing so I claim (should you ever happen to exist) your gratitude.

The delay in the completion of the Chelsea Works was responsible for my being still in harness at Clapham at the date of the occurrence I have now to describe, and for all the incidents that my being on the spot involved. I will give the narrative as it comes to my recollection.

I had been feeling uneasiness about my Father on the old Whiskey question. During the first six months of his married life his wife had been most exemplary, carrying away the bottle, after an allowance, with Spartan fortitude. I date a certain relaxation of discipline from my own wedding-breakfast, when it was impossible to cast a damper on my dear old Daddy's innocent enjoyment of *my* happiness by reminding him of his own shortcomings in the past. How would you have had me set about it? We did all we could in the way of hypnotic suggestion and jocular interdict; but, as you may imagine, the "only this once" concession was too popular for resistance, and its justice was so obvious to the concessionaire that he took advantage of it after the feeblest protest. He failed altogether to carry out a promise to pretend he was sober, and to make a short story shorter still, he got drunk.

This unfortunate incident, which could only have been prevented (as I think) by keeping him away from my wedding, made a break in the continuity of his wife's wholesome discipline. It discouraged her, and made an unfortunate precedent. For was it not clear as daylight that next day the delinquent was as right as a trivet? Well, then—the day after, at any rate! You couldn't say fairer than that. You couldn't say much about it, if you were me, as in this case you were; and therefore you held your tongue.

When we returned from our honeymoon, with a honey fortnight extra to make it up to six weeks, my first enquiry of my stepmother was how had he been? He had been very good and manageable. But the more *apprivoisé* he was, the greater was the tendency to reward him by concessions. "It *is* difficult, Master Joseph," said Pheener, "to say he shan't have only half a glass more when he says he won't ask for it. If he was to grab for the bottle I should just run away with it and there an end." I could see that docility was fatal.

Another difficulty that had to be met was a practice of anticipating his allowance under a solemn promise to forego it later. When later came, it found bygones quite ready to be bygones, if only you wouldn't bother. And it was always only that once! How intensely *once* everything is, if you only look at it at the time! All the subsequent lapses occurred once and once only; but then each occurred once, and exhausted its individual powers of mischief.

The dipsomaniac, in spite of the many syllables that palliate him, is no better than the sot in his forlorn brevity. The former obtains access to stimulants whenever he is able to elude the watchfulness of his guardians; the latter gets nips when you ain't lookin'. The former endeavours to conceal the symptoms of intoxication; the latter tries to 'umbug you into thinking him sober. The former suffers agonies of remorse after each relapse, and follows it with good resolutions, which he breaks. The latter does it again. That is the only traceable difference. For both go to the bad.

My Father might have gone to the bad, had he lived long enough. For when I look back on his relations to the whiskey-bottle I am able to divide their history into three distinct chapters. The first begins at my Mother's death. The second at Lossie Thorpe's wedding. The third at my own. This last is a short chapter, but is a record of a steady *dégringolade.* The fact is that Pheener, left alone, was not strong enough for the position. And I could see at once when I came back from my visit to Normandy that Pheener's expression "good and manageable" was a tribute to my Father's moral nature, rather than an affirmation of her success.

It was not, however, fair to expect Pheener to combat her husband's unhappy propensity, and check it except when he was well within range. Had he been always under her eye, I believe matters might have gone better. But unfortunately, the growth of the business involved constant additions of premises, and one of these, a City Office of a most convincing nature, redolent of polished mahogany compartments, and classification and solvency, demanded my Father's almost daily presence. I don't exactly know what he did there, but then I don't exactly know what any one did. For even Mr. Hickman, now a most august functionary, and understood to be liable to break out into a partnership at any moment, as Vesuvius into an eruption, never seemed to be doing anything. Some work must have been done some time, or it would have been impossible to be referred by folio 387 to folio 2, and by folio 2 to folio 763 P. L., whatever that meant, with any result but discomfiture and despair. Certainly my Father didn't do it. It would have been contrary to his great principle of never doing anything with his own hands. But it appeared to be necessary to the business that he should spend half the day in the very luxurious inner sanctum he had provided for himself. And there was nothing in the world to hinder the secretion of whiskey in any of the responsible safes and cupboards that made such a parade of candid labels describing their contents. I dwell on this point for the exoneration of Pheener, who I really believe did her best under the circumstances.

It was in the middle of a six weeks' frost, towards the end of January. Everybody was miserable, except the skating public, which enjoyed itself all the more on that account. Its attitude of patronage towards the frozen and choked majority was insufferable. I record this on the authority of my wife, as I myself was one of the minority, always getting a good morning's skating before lunch and departing afterwards to attend to business at

Clapham. Luckily trade was paralyzed and things were flat, or it would have been the worse for business.

Vehicles were quite out of the question. So after nearly three hours' skating on the Serpentine, a walk home to refresh, and then another to the works, I was beginning to acknowledge fatigue. I found my Father just going back after a late lunch. He recognized the fact that if he had been taking an abnormal glass of whiskey the weather would have justified it, and seized the opportunity to apologize for his usual excess. "The fog sticks in the toobs," he said, and tapped the pit of his stomach to explain their locality. We walked to the Works together. "Nobody could see to walk straight, in such a fog," he said. He did not try to make the fog responsible for anybody's thick articulation, so no doubt he was unaware of his own. I cannot recall that I observed anything out of the common in his condition; but I fear this only shows how very much in the first three years of my married life I had to come to accept as being within the common.

One of the most insidious features of alcohol poisoning is the way it imposes on bystanders, who go into a conspiracy to assist each other in self-deception about its existence. The gate porter Caplin touched his hat to me, and looked in another direction, lest we should betray a mutual consciousness that the Governor was drunk. The men who were loading up planking for that job of Pettigrew's (*teste* Caplin) changed an attitude of lazy unconsciousness about worldly things and perfect content with status-quo's for an ostentatious parade of ignorance that the Governor was drunk. The yard-foreman Shaw's manner said, almost audibly, that whoever else was drunk, the Governor wasn't. But his tongue only said we wanted a little wind to blow the fog away. The yard dog Nelson alone had the candour to express a doubt, for he smelt my Father suspiciously, and retired dissatisfied. He followed his tail twice round to get its opinion; but it shirked giving any; so Nelson heaved a deep sigh and went to sleep. Or rather pretended to, for I saw his eye fixed on my Father when he thought no one was looking.

I fell in with the general imposture, and pretended there was not the slightest reason why I should not depart to my own portion of the Works. So I left my poor Daddy giving perfectly intelligent instructions about points awaiting his decision, in a very thick and husky tone of voice. "*Do* I ever make a mistake, Nipper? Come now!" he would say to me, when I endeavoured to read him a Whiskey-lecture—and I was always obliged to confess that it was almost never, at any rate. But the worst part of this excessive clearness of mind in some such cases is its production of overweening confidence up to the moment of some tremendous betrayal, when its victim is involved in a catastrophe that might have been avoided if a few lesser blunders had occurred to give warning. My Father's mistake was a cruel instance, for though it was one that he would never have committed when perfectly sober, it was also one committed every day by persons of less judgment than his, even with a small allowance of upset from drink. On this occasion no doubt he was affected rather more than usual.

I passed up into my floor of the factory, where all the lathes were busily at work, though it was, as the shop-foreman said, mighty hard to see the tip of your own nose. The gas burned wretchedly, as it always does in thick fogs. Demand does not create supply at an hour's notice, unless it has been anticipated and provided for; a reservation which rather takes the edge off that great truth of Political Economy, and leaves the demander making use of strong language ineffectually. In the present case the supply was even worse than usual in a bad fog. "It's not often as bad as this," said Willis, the shop-foreman. "It might have been in the main, only I see nothing wrong with the street lamps." Willis was astute and far-sighted, and a great consolation to me. I told him to go down to the meters, and take the pressure as near as possible to ours. For I saw the light in their building was better, and of course each had its own meter.

Presently Willis came back in haste. "There's an escape somewhere in the building," said he. "The pressure's a lot better at the meter."

"Smell enough to knock your head off down the passage over agen the wash'us crossing over by the Stores." The speaker was a young man at a lathe, who did not take his eyes off his work or show any interest in his own speech, which he appeared to have deputed to his tongue to say, and washed his mind of. I told Willis to go down and see about it, and went into my little office. There I found a heap of letters to grapple with—one manifestly from India which ought to have gone to the house. I put it in my pocket to read later, and gazed blankly at the stack that remained. I was very tired, and I knew well that ten minutes' sleep would reinstate me completely—it always did. Yes! I would have my ten minutes' sleep and then tackle the correspondence.

No sooner had I sat down in the visitor's chair near the fire than I began to dream. I was in no time the Mayor or Syndic of a glorious old town at the foot of a precipice; and on the edge of that precipice was a huge projecting rock big enough to accommodate what I had known from my earliest boyhood as the Schloss. For in that dream I recalled endless memories of early youth—as in dreams one does! But the great dread and terror of all the inhabitants (I think I knew most of them by name, and had done so for years) was that the Rock of the Schloss was slowly, slowly detaching itself and must some day come down, Schloss and all, one thundering mass of destruction and ruin, on the old beloved streets where I had played as a boy; on the stately town-hall, with its tower full of bells whose *carillon* seemed never to cease sounding; on the twin spires of a cathedral all Europe came to see and wonder at. How harrowed was I (and the town-council) at the impending inevitable fate. And quite suddenly it occurred to me (after so many years of quiescence!) that engineering might have a voice in the matter. A scheme was devised (I can recollect scientific details even now) for diverting the water that was wearing channels in the neck of the rock, for buttressing from below and so forth; and it was all arranged and we made ready to start when, with a deafening crash, down comes the Schloss bodily—and no doubt converted the whole place to a heap of ruins I did not sleep long enough to see, for I only heard the first half of the dream-crash. I was awake in time to catch the last half of a tremendous concussion in the basement, to know at once the meaning of the rattle of broken glass that followed, the shouts and trampling in the black darkness (for not a light was left burning in our part of the building) and the voice of Willis, the foreman, saying, "It's the gas!"

We felt our way through the darkness till the still burning gas-lamps in the other works enabled us to run for the scene of the explosion. If you can imagine a catastrophe in Hell, and an army of terrified men shouting to one another that they said so all along, and they could have told you what would happen, and that anybody might have known it, and that they supposed nobody had gone for the engines now,—if you can imagine this, and yourself waked suddenly, from a dream, you will know what I felt like within a minute of the collapse of that Schloss.

I heard one man shout to another through the fog, where was the Guv'nor?—The other replied that Christopher was inside, but that Joseph wasn't there. I knew that the men among themselves distinguished us by our Christian names, but it was unusual to me to overhear them. Perhaps this was why I did not realize their meaning. I ran on through the yard towards the Stores, and just as I arrived the flame was breaking out of the upper windows.

Before me was the passage over agen the wash'us where the smell had been enough to knock your head off. A boy who was inexplicably called Mary Anne by the workmen pulled my sleeve and shouted something I could not catch. Caplin, the gate porter, shouted to him, "You shut up, young Polly, he ain't." But Polly was not to be put off, and shrieked again what I now heard was "The Guv'nor's in there," and pointed along the passage. And at this moment Shaw, the yard-foreman, and another came running out of the entry pursued by smoke, having ventured in in search of the Governor.

It was a back-puff of smoke, such as comes from a first-lighted fire; and I saw the fag end of it caught back by the returning draught. I dashed in at once, followed by others. To be in that long passage in such smoke (the denser for the fog) would mean suffocation. What if it did? My Father was inside. The dog Nelson, anxious to be of real service, bolted in and went ahead of us, nearly tripping me up. On we went till Caplin called out to me from behind, "I hear the Guv'nor," and ran down a side passage. I and the others followed. There, in a reflected gleam from above somewhere, was the Guv'nor, but I am sorry to say very drunk. It had developed, perhaps been helped, since I saw him.

"If shome of you young men," said he, reproachfully, "inshtead of makin' all that hollerin' outside, was to come in here and try to find out what'sh afire, you might make shelf shumyewsh."

"*Catch* hold!" said I. And four of us seized him and dragged him with unscrupulous violence into the outer passage. Here he became so anxious to explain to us that something was on fire, that we made even shorter work of him, laying him out and each taking a limb. "It's *me,* Daddy," I thundered in his ear. And I think it was his hazy appreciation of the fact that he was in charge of the Nipper that made removal possible. He was a strong man and weighed nineteen stone, and action had to be very prompt. As it was, the last dozen steps of our exit were through another puff of smoke that followed us along the passage and half choked all four bearers, whose heads, being high, got the worst of it. He himself was no more inarticulate than before when we all fell in a heap at the entrance.

"I shaid shum'fn wash afire," said he, triumphantly, and then with an extraordinary presence of mind added, "See to getting the horshesh out."

"Jump up, Daddy," said I, for he still remained flat on his back. "There's the engines!" And in little more time than it takes to tell, the whole of the yards were teeming with brazen helmets, fire escapes, coils of piping—everything, in fact, except the one thing needful, water. But my Father still lay flat on his back; and the developing blaze, now constantly working through at unexpected points, made the heat insupportable. "Jump *up,* Dad," I cried again, and tried to get him up. But he could not move, and when I tried again, he gave a cry of pain. So terrible was the heat that there was nothing for it but to drag him, pain or no. I shouted this into the ear of a brazen helmet, whose undisturbed face showed immediate apprehension and nodded. A litter appeared by magic, out of chaos, and two more undisturbed helmets somehow got him under weigh for the gate, and I followed with the world turning round.

I had had a rather sharp shake myself in leaving the passage, and I was so confused that I did not realize at first that he was being carried into a neighbour's house, not into his own. The brass helmet which accompanied the two volunteer bearers explained, "No water, all froze. What wind there is dead on the house. Have to be moved again in an hour," and departed without emotion. From which I gathered that we might look forward to the complete destruction not only of the Works but of the house, and probably several of the neighbours' houses. I felt sorry for the neighbours, but hoped that they were as well insured as we were!

My Father's mind was struggling with his overdose of whiskey. His half-articulate speech (which I find no pleasure in trying to spell phonetically) referred chiefly to the safety of the horses; most of which, as a concession to the almost impassable state of the roads, were in the stable. But he had understood quite clearly what the fireman had said about the danger to the house, and was very anxious about a certain packet which was in what he called his shaving drawer. The moment he had with some difficulty explained this and given me his keys, I left him in charge of the terrified strangers to whom the house belonged, and struggled through the crowd until I reached the cordon of police that was guarding the area of destruction including the house. I had some trouble to get passed through. The roar of the conflagration, for it had seized the timber-stacks in the yard, and was rejoicing at the capture and leaping up into the fog overhead, and the arrival of fresh engines, and the shouts of the mob that had sprung from nowhere within twenty minutes, all combined to make verbal communication difficult. I got through by showing my visiting card to a Sergeant of Police, and got into the house just as the

Salvage Corps took possession—a tranquil-minded body of men, steeped I should say in philosophical reflection, and quite independent of externals. I ran upstairs to the dressing-room, but found the door locked. A Salvage Corps man was close behind me. "Who might you be?" said he, reflectively, but did not seem interested in the answer. "Can you open this door?" said I. He remarked that he might try, and stepping back for impetus drove an iron boot-heel like a battering-ram true on to the keyhole. The screws of the lock gave way with a crash, and I followed him into the room.

"There's more ways than one," said he, placidly, "of getting a door open."

Every pane of glass in the window was broken, and the awful fog-lurid glare from the burning timber-yard less than fifty yards away showed what terrible progress the fire was making. I went straight to my Father's dressing-table. The Salvage man demurred to my interfering with anything, saying those were his instructions; but my production of the keys and my card was accepted as evidence of my status, and I soon found the packet. Almost before I had done this, he had closed the shutters to keep out the spark-drift, and made a bundle of a feather-bed and all the valuable tailor's work in the cupboards. I saw why. No water was expected and all the salvage would be goods carried out. I was useless evidently; so I left the position in the hands of experience, and fought my way back to the neighbour's house where I had left my Father.

In all this time no enquiry had crossed my mind about where my stepmother and the household were. But "all this time" had been so very little, counted by minutes. It takes long to tell, but, from when the Schloss came down in the dream, on that ancient city that I remembered every nook of, to the moment of my return with the rescued packet to my Father at the Philip Slacks' three doors off opposite, was certainly not more than thirty-five minutes all told. When I escaped out of the roar and confusion of the street into my Father's harbour of refuge I found the terrified womankind beside him, having been persuaded to clear out of the threatened house by the Police. In order, however, to facilitate salvage operations, Pheener had carefully locked all the lockable doors and brought the keys away. My Father was indignant. "Whash yewsh-lockin' dam-locks?" said he in three words. I consoled him by producing the packet he wanted. He handed it to his wife with a caution that come what might she should never let it go out of her keeping. But he never raised himself up off the sofa he had been laid on, and I could see plainly that he was suffering from some shake or strain, encountered when he fell as we brought him out of the smoke.

Those who have never been in a fire or shipwreck can form no idea of the overwhelming power of the unfettered elements, and the utter helplessness of the human unit against them. I knew that I could avert nothing that it was still possible to avert, and could save nothing that it was still possible to save, one-half as well as the highly trained skill that had now the task in hand. So I remained by my Father. He was getting very sleepy and stupid, and when in the course of another hour of glare and roar of fire, and shouting of human throats, and trampling of men and horses, there came a great crash followed by a greater roar and a new blaze, he only remarked (quite correctly) that the roof had fallen in. "Schnomatter," he added, "shorance covers all risks," and dropped off into a balmy slumber.

It was then that Shaw, the yard-foreman, came in and gave me an insight into what had happened. His loyalty to the fiction that my Father was not drunk was beautiful and touching.

"It was just like this, Mr. Joseph—you see, Mr. Vance was just enquiring whether the architect on that job of Pettigrew's was a fool, or what he was, for to go and stick up a bressumer made of a quarter-inch flitch and a couple of battens; when it orter have been a proper wrot-iron girder to carry that four story of ware-'uses of heavy goods—and o' course the guv'nor was right, and any child might have known——"

"Get along, Shaw! Never mind the girder."

"Well, Sir, I says to the Guv'nor, I says, 'I'm only cartin' 'em off what's on the order, wrote plain, and it ain't for me to judge. If they was to order pickles I should have to send 'em, if they was in the yard.'"

"And then my Father said?—Cut on, Shaw——"

"He said nothing, Sir. But I says, 'If the order's countersigned by the storekeeper, wot then?' I says. And then, he says, 'Where's that fool Riley?'—he's that noo storekeeper came when Gabriel went—hashmatic chap—you know?"

"Of course. Get along, etc." I was obliged to urge Shaw forward. And thus urged he became more concise and told how my Father went to look for Riley in the stores, and he wasn't there. And there was a strong smell of gas in the passage—a most noticeable strong smell, Mr. Vance said. And Mr. Vance, half asleep, corrected the adjective *noticeable*, and laid claim to having used one which I suppose Shaw's delicacy had suppressed.

It was the one I had occasion to record once or twice at the beginning of this narrative. My Father had practically abolished its use—but when by any chance he harked back to it, he was too honourable to shirk acknowledgment.

Shaw had then left my Father in the passage, and gone to examine the upper building. He passed Willis just coming down after having seen me, and was coming out of the upper story to report that the place was choked with gas (no lights were lighted there, of course) when the explosion came, breaking every window and flinging him into the yard. He was up in an instant and back in the lower passage searching for my Father. He had been beaten back twice by the smoke when I came down.

I am glad now to think that my Father was never conscious that he was the cause of the explosion. For when he told me his version afterwards it was clear that he had lighted a wax Vesta match on the wall, the box-side being worn smooth; and he cited this match as a proof that the air (where he was) was inexplosive. "Besides," said he, "it wasn't alight in the sense of burning at all—for a puff of wind came sharp out of a crack in the wall and blew it out a'most before it was lighted." It was only too clear to me what had happened. My Father's power of observation had not been equal to seeing that the puff of air was an explosive mixture, coming through from a magazine ready to take a hint, and become an exploding mixture elsewhere. A sober man would have seen that the puff was the birth of the explosion, which came of age on the other side of an eighteen-inch wall, luckily for him. No doubt the atmosphere, where he was, was sorry, and envied that in the next room for being able to blow up and cut such a figure.

I left my poor Dad under his delusion. But the reason why Vance & Co.'s works at Clapham were burned to the ground in three hours was that Vance was drunk, and Co. was somewhere else.

The Philip Slacks, whose front parlour we had made such an extraordinary invasion of, were very civil; Mr. Slack having himself suggested the arrangement when the firemen were hesitating about taking my Father into his own house. Mrs. Philip Slack certainly had to be convinced that fire was not communicable, like Leprosy, before admitting us. Once convinced, she was really very hospitable and gave us tea and bread and butter to console us. But she knew my Father had married his housemaid. So it was the kitchen tea in a black Rockingham pot. And the bread and butter was not cut off the French loaf, but a household halfquartern. Pheener told me all this later. I didn't see it myself at the time, but was grateful for the tea. Perhaps it wasn't true.

How the delayed advent of the water came about I do not know—I suppose the heat melted the icy stopper of a frozen main-pipe. Anyhow, it came too late to save the house, though it was in time to stave off a visit of the Sappers and Miners, and the knocking down of a street or two. Just as Bony arrived, having been detained as a witness by a Committee of the House of Commons, the first benevolent torrents of water were beginning to hiss on the ruins of the great bonfire that had given such keen pleasure to the inhabitants of Clapham and Battersea.

But the works were a heap of blazing or smouldering ruins, and the house on the way to become so. And my Father was on his back unable to move. And the Philip Slacks were going out to dinner if the coachman thought he could manage in the fog. And I was glad when the fog lifted and the coachman thought he could, for the Philip Slacks had been very amiable, Rockingham or no, and I have still a hazy impression that I overheard Mrs. Philip say that Pheener was really almost (only-she-hated-the-expression-and wouldn't-use-it-only-she-didn't-know-any-other) a lady. Whether she knew my poor Daddy was drunk, I don't know.

"Cheer up, old man. He'll be all right with rest in a day or two. Doctor says so."

"Don't be down-hearted, Jack darling. He got right before—long ago—and he'll do it again. You see if he doesn't!"

"And as for the Factory and the House, Insurance covers everything—interruption to business—doctor's bills—everything!"

"Yes, dearest! And think what a satisfaction it is that so many things can be burned and no one lose anything. Because if you hadn't been burned somebody else would, to make up the average. Papa's told me about it heaps of times."

The speakers were Bony and my wife, alternately. The scene was our Cheyne-Row drawing-room, before a blazing fire. The time was the end of toddy-time, and the time to come a most welcome bedtime. For we had somehow contrived to transport my Father in an ambulance through the fog (which had thickened again as soon as the Philip Slacks' coachman had committed himself) and had followed in its wake—a melancholy procession of six persons—Bony, my stepmother, Cook, the housemaid, house-parlourmaid, and myself. The boy Nips was known to be safe from the flames, but preferred to remain behind to impede the firemen, so far as opportunity should be vouchsafed to him; to misinform the inquisitive, and in short to enjoy thoroughly an occasion not likely to come twice in a life. There was fortunately no difficulty about finding room for the outcasts in our two households. So we were looking forward to sleeping in comfort, after just a few minutes more of recapitulation. I felt I ought to do my share of the cheering up, and shook off some vague misgiving of further evil that I had kept on feeling at intervals.

"I wasn't thinking about that," said I. "I was thinking about that jolly old place I told you of at dinner--what the Schloss came down on."

"Poor, dear, silly Jack! And you were the Syndic?"

"Yes, and there was such a nice family, the Schneiders—who lived on the Lindenstrasse—three such pretty girls. Hedwig was the youngest—they might have let me sleep a little longer."

Just at this point Jeannie came back putting things on to go back home. She became so interested about Hedwig that I had to assure her I was married already in the dream and had five daughters myself, all as ugly as their mother and as worthy. Her sympathies were so excited that Bony had to drag her away!

"And oh, you poor, dear, darling Jack," said Janey, when we were left alone. "How you *did* look when you came in, black all over! And if I hadn't seen you before I saw the ambulance, I don't know what wouldn't have happened! Where ever did you get it?"

"I don't know—it came! They are to come for it. Who are *they?* I haven't the remotest idea. I have no idea of anything—I only know I have a letter from Lossie in my pocket I haven't read, and you must read it to me at breakfast."

"Give it to me. Nothing from Hedwig, I suppose?"

"Nothing, so far. I'm afraid they're all squashed. It's very sad. What's that?"

"It's a ring at the front-door bell. What can it be at this time of night?"

It was an officer of the Fire-Brigade, who left other brass helmets outside, in an atmosphere of lamp glare and horse-steam and hoof-stamps, and came in to confer. He was quite fresh and happy, an image of contentment emerging from a fog.

"Sorry to trouble you again, Sir. Mr. Joseph Vance, I think? On account of particulars for report. Christopher Vance and Son, Builders—?"

"And Co.," said I, "not Son. And Vance and Macallister, Engineers."

"Quite right, Sir," said he, referring to a pocketbook as though confirming an accurate guess, that did me credit. "Building of five stories in use as Workshops, Out-buildings, and Timber-yard. Detached Residence of two stories, occupied by Mr. C. Vance. Cause fire due Gas Explosion in basement. Owing to water-supply—hum—hm—impeded by frost—found impossible—save any portion of buildings. Loss falls on——? Can you kindly supply Insurance Offices, Mr. Vance?"

"I'm afraid I can't. My Father attended to all that. Stop a minute! If he's awake I'll ask him." And I ran upstairs to do so, but Pheener, who had remained with him all the evening, and had now gone to bed herself, told me through the door that he was quite sound, and it would be a pity to wake him. I agreed, and went back. Janey had been chatting with the officer. "Oh, Jack dear," said she, "it is so sad—poor Nelson—the rough dog you know that lived in the yard? You know? Well, he was found dead in the basement—not burned, but choked by the smoke."

"Just under the first explosion, Mr. Vance. Flame didn't reach—but smoke and heat to kill a dozen dogs. Must have got in at the first go-off. Otherwise no casualty. With reference to the Insurance, Mr. Vance?"

"My Father's asleep, and I don't want to wake him. Can't you say merely that the premises were fully insured?"

"So far as can be ascertained, fully covered by insurance—naming no office." Thus the fireman, who then took his leave, declining refreshment, and hoping he hadn't put us out.

"What an odd hope for a fireman!" said Janey. "But think of that poor dog!"

Poor Nelson! He had seen clearly that my Father was not able to take care of himself, and had run in to help. He overshot his mark in the passage, and no doubt went searching about in the smoke until he met his death.

The young person who does me out, and sees to me and lights my fire too late, and makes my bed without tucking it in at the end—so that spectres would get hold of my toes if I didn't always religiously tuck it in myself—this young person could not get the fire to burn this morning of March, 1895. I am not surprised. If I had been a fire laid like that I would not have burned, myself. But the young person, Betsy Austin, driven to lawlessness by failure, appropriated a portion of a broken drawer of an old desk I was patching up, and forcing it in upwards and sideways and downwards into the incombustible matrix she was blowing the smoke out of into her eyes and the room, decided that it had caught and would do now, and devoted herself to laying the breakfast. I was just in time to snatch the bit of mahogany from the fire and put it in my bath-water. It fizzed and went out, and then tried to pretend it wasn't spoiled, ineffectually.

And it made the whole place smell strong of extinguished burning wood. And the smell thereof brought back to me the day of my last chapter, as nothing but a smell can bring things back. It brought back my ride down with Bony to the cinder heap that had been the works, and the Hansom Cabman, who, when he was told where to drive, said, "I know—close by where the fire was last night." His respect for us went up enormously when he found that we were in a sort of way "The Fire" ourselves, or near relations.

Oh, the ghastliness of the ruin and destruction! It was heart-sickening to think of the contents of that dreadful heap of smouldering rubbish that choked up what had been the lowest story of the main building. It was still rebellious, but was being pumped on by a dispassionate engine, which was so sure it would beat in the end that it never lost its temper, or said an angry word. I knew that heap contained the *caput mortuum* of all my drawings of machinery inventions for years past, and all the costly plant that was soon to have been carefully removed to the new Chelsea buildings, and half-completed contracts by the ton. And I knew the worst of it would be—that everything in that heap would be just quite spoiled, but no more. There would be lathes that would still do to stand outside a second-hand dealer's in Southwark, but that would never turn true again; planing machines with bed-plates like beds on which angular people have had sleepless nights; drilling-machines that wagged their drills as dogs their tails; things with eccentric movements whose eccentricities had become ungovernable. In that heap were those letters that I had seen on my desk, all but the one from Lossie. That was something saved, at any rate.

Firemen with small nozzles were putting finishing touches on the extinction, after the coarse work done by the big water-jets, just as painters use small sables after hog-hair has done its worst. Every now and then came a crash of falling timber or wall—tenacious bits that had remained behind when the roof fell in. Daring helmeted climbers with axes were helping down these stragglers, and as it seemed to me running needless risks to this end. I thought all hands would be best employed shoring up the front of the high building, and said so to the head fireman. He evidently doubted our statement that we were Vance & Macallister, and held a kind of court of identification under the wall we had thought dangerous. Having reluctantly conceded that we had an interest in the property, he looked up at the overhanging wall (the fall of which would have killed all three) and expressed confidence in its stability, but to indulge our whim remarked that you might shore up most walls. There were any number of men available, so I had a temporary affair rigged up at once. I was gratified to hear from the same fireman later in the day, that if it hadn't been for that bit of timber "we" thought of putting up, that wall would have come down on some of us. He must have been a brother of Pring.

If a burned-out factory is sad, a burned-out home is sadder still. One half-burned is perhaps the worst of all. The roof of my Father's house and the upper floors were completely wrecked by the fire. The lower ones were scorched by the burning ceilings, but the deluge of water that came at last had done its best to finish the job. Some of the furniture and pictures had been got away; but a good deal remained, the Salvage Corps having dealt with the lower rooms last, believing that the water would be in time to save them. I saw my Father's leather armchair in the snuggery, in a stack covered with tarpaulins to shelter it from the expected deluge. There also I found his writing-table, which I was glad of, but it was tight in the stack, and the building was not safe, so for the present I made no effort to extract it. On the chimneypiece stood an empty whiskey-bottle looking jaunty. How it must have chuckled over its handiwork!

Two refrains ran continuously through the whole—one cheerful, the other depressing. The first was the universal conviction that Insurance covered everything, the second the equally universal, all-pervading stench of the water on the burned wood. No wonder the same smell brought it all back to me so vividly this morning! It drove me away at last from a place where I could be of no further use. I merely arranged with the Salvagee in charge for the delivery of some goods (which I specified) at the house in Chelsea, and told my partner I should go home, whether he did or not. I wanted to see my Father, who was probably awake by now.

"Just take one more turn round," said Bony, "in case there's anything."

We took one more turn round, and there was nothing. Only, just as we were leaving what had been the Office at the Works, my eye was caught by something that struck me as familiar. It was a burned piece of board, some two feet long, with an inscription on it. And enough was still visible to show me, who knew it of old, that it ran, "C. Vance—Builder—Repairs—Drains promptly attended to."

No wonder the smell of my burnt desk brought it back. I will not replace that bit of broken drawer (for I know it will smell), though Betsy Austin expresses contempt for my "finicking" precision, and alleges that I am making a fuss about nothing. "Just as good as ever it was," is her verdict. She does not seem to see that an isolated escape from her destroying hand will do little to counteract her defects as a maid-of-all-work. She will speak of me downstairs as a sort of precise old maid, bent on interrupting the well-organized routine of what she calls her Work. This presents itself to me as a whirlwind. And no slight one either, for Betsy's arms are not only fine arms, but strong ones, and she can just as soon smash the furniture as tidy it up, which is an accomplishment she claims perfection in.

Am I sure I am not writing this with the intention of leaving it open on my desk that Betsy may read it, and be wounded by my poignant sarcasms? I am, because I know that Betsy would be adamant, and would include it in the broad category she describes as my nonsense.

But I have nothing to do with Betsy now. I have to get back to my sheep—my sheep that are memories, browsing in the memories of pastures of thirty years ago!

CHAPTER XXXVI

OF A BRAIN-WAVE THAT WENT TO INDIA. AND OF AN OPTICAL DELUSION. HOW JOE TOOK THE NEWS TO DR. THORPE, AND BEPPINO WAS A BORE. AUNT IZZY TOO DEAF FOR ANYTHING. DR. THORPE AND JOE WALK TO CHELSEA.

"I WONDER what Lady Desprez meant, Jack?" said Janey that afternoon. She and I and my stepmother were at tea in the drawing-room. "Lady who?" said I. For I was always forgetting that now that her husband was Sir Hugh, Lossie was a Lady.

"Well—Lossie, then!" replied Janey. "What we read in her letter at breakfast. Give me her letter and I'll read it again. Or stop a minute, till I send your Father his tea. If you're sure neither of you will have another cup, I can send the pot up." We were sure, so, as I had not seen very much of my Dad, who remained on his back by the Doctor's orders, I carried him up his tea on a baby tray, to which concessions of tea-components were made by the parent tray; the more readily as the fog, which was nearly as bad as yesterday, made visitors very improbable.

If he had not been ordered to remain still by a Doctor, he would never have tried to move. Indeed, he had only done so once or twice in order to upset the diagnosis, and in doing so had suffered great pain. But it made him feel happier, and he was now deriving great satisfaction from pretending he could move if he was allowed, and ascribing interested motives to the third person plural, who was scheming, he said, to keep him on the flat list.

"If they was to let me get up and walk about a bit, Nipper," said he, "I should soon be right enough. But they always was at that game, and always will be. Makin' a job! Just like 'em! Tea? That's good. Nothin' like a Nipper, after all! Oh yes, I can sit up, Joey dear, right enough."

But he couldn't, without me to raise him. And what a difficult job it is to manipulate nineteen stone, that can't help itself!

"P'r'aps little Clementina will toast me a big bit of thick toast herself, soft inside. This stuff ain't toast at all, not as I look at it. I should consider it match-boxes——" So I went down again, and the drawing-room fire being superb, the toasting-fork was rung for. "Give it me, Mast—" said Pheener, and I fixed her with my eye. "Give it me, Joseph," said she, correcting herself, and I handed her the fork.

"It is very curious," said Janey, going back to our former conversation. And as I stood waiting for the toast, she read again from Lossie's letter:

"I am making myself very uncomfortable about your father, and I have no idea why. There is nothing in your last letter to point to any disaster. I dare say it is only imagination. I hope so. But whenever I think of him it is always on precipices, and he is always going to put his foot down in the wrong place, and no one is there to stop him. If I commit myself thoroughly to being thought superstitious and morbid, perhaps it will be the best way to avert the omen. Papa used always to say that vaticinations after the fact were the only ones that came true. So I will get myself thoroughly involved, in the interest of yourself and your Daddy, and place my presentiment boldly on record, so that it may turn out false. It is just a fortnight since that I said to Hugh that I was sure something was going wrong, and that was the time I felt it most strongly. I shall be so glad, dear Joe, when I get your next letter, and find, as I hope I shall, no bad news. I can't get your letter covering that date for more than a month. What nuisances time and space are!"

"Then the letter goes on about the children," said Janey. "But isn't it odd, Jack?"

"I thought it was odd when we read it at breakfast. But, anyhow, you see, it was a false presentiment, because the date of the letter is November the third, and Dad was quite well all through October. You know the Chinese proverb, 'Cherish the false Prophet who predicts disaster, and the true one who foresees health.'—Isn't that toast done?"

It was, and I carried it upstairs.

"There's two beggars with a wan at the gate," said my Father. I looked out. It was the salvaged goods I had told them to send on. "They'll want a formal receipt for them, I expect. They'll be credited to the Globe Insurance on the house, being Salvage—at least, I suppose so. What was there?"

There were some pictures from the drawing-room, the writing table from the Snuggery, and so forth. I mentioned all I recollected.

"I shouldn't mind," said my Father, with a sadder note in his voice than I had so far heard, "if them two picters of Stags before Letters was put up here for me to look at. I shouldn't feel so cut adrift from your Mother, dear Nipper." I said they should come.

"And that's a knee-hole table, and comes in four. Two sides, top. and pigeonholes to stand on. They might carry that up too. There's papers in it." I promised this also, and went to give directions.

The pictures and the table were soon brought up. My Father seemed more interested about the pictures than the table, and lay looking at them.

"Never mind looking at the desk now. We'll do him to-morrow. There's no hurry for anything now, not till 'Ickman's commoonicated with the Insurance."

Hickman had called in the morning, but I was away at the new Works, and my Father was asleep. He slept a good deal. Hickman had left word that he would call to-morrow afternoon. My Father lit his pipe.

"Your Mother never saw those two," said he. "What's their names? Stags without Words, or something? Miss Dowdeswell had better dust the frames of them." He called his wife Miss Dowdeswell, having never once called her so, until to oblige him she gave up being Miss Dowdeswell. She said he was that contradictious! As for the last new picture title, it was due to Jeannie having played some Mendelssohn, and his having asked the name of that toon.

"No—your Mother she was to have come down and seen 'em, and she never came. Never having seen 'em, I mix 'em up with her, natural like, and it's less by way of being cut adrift. I can only see the reflection of the winder in that one. Give him a tilt. There ain't much light to see anything by." He smoked awhile peacefully, and then began, "I say, Nipper dear——"

"What, Dad?"

"Was I *very* drunk?" I felt it was a case for prequivocation, and that I was on dangerous ground. So I asked why? "But *was* I?" said he.

"That depends, Daddy dear, on what you call drunk. You might have had less. It doesn't matter now. Let's talk about the Stags."

"Got anything partick'lar to say about the Stags?"

"Nothing very particular."

"Then let's talk about the drink. You see, that's what it turns on." I asked what it was that turned on it.

"Only—what do you call those games they have at Scientific Lecters—not conjuring, but red and green lines, and vertical and horizontal?—— When you always get took in whether or no?" I got a clue and suggested Optical Delusions. "To be sure," said he, and then after a puff or two went on:

"Now the question is, was this here an Optical Delusion? When they brought me across to what's-their-names—Placket Hole's or something like it—on that portable hammock turn-out—I was thinking of nothing but getting the horses out of the stables before they was redooced to ashes."

"Of course they were got out first thing," I interjected.

"Of course. But when you're in a stage of intoxication, you're mostly muddled, whatever the stage may be. Anyhow, I wasn't thinking of your Mother. And she says to me quite sharp and sudden like——"

"Hullo," said I, under my breath, for I thought he was delirious and began feeling his pulse.

"Feel away, Nipper dear," said he. "I'm just as normal as usual, and fairer than that I can't say. When you've put your watch up, we'll get along!" As he was, if anything, less normal than usual (admitting the expression), I put my watch up, and felt I cut a therapeutic figure. He continued:

"—quite sharp and sudden like, 'Recollect Pheener's packet'——"

"Do you mean you *heard* her, or only thought you heard her?"

"Well, dear boy, you see they're so dam like if you only think hard enough. It was one or the other. But was it an Optical Delusion? Or was it doo to Alcohol? Or what? I heard it, anyhow—that clear that if it had crossed my mind that the Insurance would cover that like anything else, I should have spoke out plain to your Mother not to fret about it, and it would have been put down to the score of the Alcohol. Because to speak fair, Nipper dear, your disgustin' old Daddy had been, what with the cold and the taste of the fog, giving himself a sort of"—he hesitated a moment—"a sort of alcoholiday, in the manner of speaking."

"Dear old Dad! You'll never be disgusting, not if you were as drunk as a Lord."

"But suppose I was as drunk as the House of Lords—hay, boy?" And my Father laughed and rolled about in his old manner But I think it hurt him, for his breath caught, and he stopped short with, "All right, Joey, it's nothing!"

"But what *was* the packet?" I asked.

"A bit of knick-knack little Clementina gave me to take care of for her. It was a trifle I gave her before she packed her boxes. And she gave it me back to take care of, of her own free will. And she ain't to look at it now. So we'll just say nothing about it. The man in the shop where I bought it called it a Tiarrhoea."

"A what?"

"A Tiarrhoea. Like before taking, shake the bottle. A wineglassful after every——"

But the entry of Miss Dowdeswell herself made it impossible to pursue the subject.

Next day I went over to Dr. Thorpe's early. I thought the chances were very large that that Library Beggar (as my Father had called him) being immersed in his books, and only glancing very slightly at the paper, would know nothing about the fire until I went to tell him. I was quite right.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "What, Joe! All burned, house and all."

"A few scraps saved from the house. Otherwise all converted into oxides, with evolution of caloric."

"But, Joe—Joe dear—don't make chemical jokes! Tell me. How did it happen? When did it begin? Was it any one's fault? Will the Insurance cover it?"

"Oh yes—fully covered by Insurance." But why did I feel conscious that I was mechanically repeating the fireman's words, not speaking from my own knowledge?

"Well! That's a good job, anyhow!" and the Doctor looked relieved. "And how is every one? How's your Father?"

"That's the worst of it. I'm afraid he's had a bad shake in the back—a recrudescence of an old accident—a thing that happened ages ago. Just before you set me going in life, Doctor!" And I gave the Doctor the whole story of the fire, finishing with the passage in Lossie's letter, which I had brought to show him, and my Father's fancy about my Mother's voice.

"Two eerie incidents in one day!" said he. "I always think these things should be put on record. But Loss was evidently at fault, because it has all come about later. I should of course like the other thing to be what it seemed. You know my ideas?"

I knew them and should have liked to talk about them. But we were interrupted by the appearance of Beppino.

Perhaps if ever you read this—(and recollect! If you don't read this you won't be in existence. So look out for squalls)—you will notice that I scarcely describe any of my memories of people. This is because I am not a real author. If I were, I would tell all about their exact shape, size, weight, colour, and manner before ever they said a single word in dialect, which of course they would do. I would finish up a description of a character (for instance) by saying that a pair of leather leggings the worse for wear, and shooting-boots down at heel that had been cut on the top to accommodate gouty swellings, completed the description of good old Isaac as I recollected him, and only at the end of my page or two of description allow him to say to his wife, "Be you gwine to zimmer they ta'aties?" or "Kick 'em in t' stummuck if they wean't budge," or something similar. But even if I were a real author I couldn't describe Beppino at this time, for he was never the same six months together, and I used only to see him at about that interval. As I seem to have committed myself to an interpolation, I may as well indulge in it.

Beppino's variations were owing to his modelling his manner for the time being on that of the last meteor of Art or Literature he had been introduced to. For Beppino had a social status and was very much introduced. He was even spoken of familiarly as Messalina Thorpe, his poem about that reprobate being the most admired of the celebrated Trilogy. At the date of these memories he was founding himself on a great dramatist and a great sculptor, neither of whom had yet got tired of him. Now the great sculptor rejoiced in (or, at any rate, never docked) a magnificent crop of red hair, and usually wore a brown velveteen coat when out of the studio. Beppino was therefore spoiling the collar of an expensive piece of tailoring by as large a hair bustle as nature allowed on the nape of his neck. And the great dramatist (apparently) never said a brilliant thing without beginning with "My dear fellow" in a sort of drawl I can't easily reproduce. But if you will say the three words, "Medea. Fill. Awe," quite deliberately with full stops, you will not be far from Beppino's reproduction. I never saw * * * * * myself, so I can't say how far the original resembled it. A few months later the fashion changed, and the only way of spelling the next pronunciation quite exactly would be "Deiphila." Try them both, and see if they sound plausible.

I believe his poems had clever passages in them, but really I never read them. A great poet of the time, whom he was said to imitate, expressed a guarded opinion about the Trilogy, namely that "it held out promise of original work." When pressed as to whether it contained any, he gave an evasive answer. Beppino thought he was jealous, but added that of course he should never say so to any one but you, whoever you were.

He was musical and sang old French songs and Italian *stornelli* with real taste and feeling. He was very popular with young ladies of an artistic and non-sporting turn. The sporting ones said they couldn't stand that sort of thing, without making it clear what sort. One, so the story went, knocked Master Beppino off the end of a rout-seat at a ball with the sweep of a powerful elbow, and said by way of apology, "Well, Mr. Joseph Thorpe, I never asked you to sit in *my* pocket!" However, I have digressed enough, and Beppino must go on coming in at the Library door, where Dr. Thorpe and I are talking about what are now called Psychical Researches.

"I thought it was you, Joe Vance." He certainly pronounced me Juvence, quite distinctly. "All goin' on well, in your part of the world? I came to borrow Arcadia, Pater."

He had come from his room upstairs, the nursery of old times, where he employed himself on various literary work. He got enough to do, I believe.

"What are you at now, Joey?" said the Doctor. "Writing Fescennine verses and Bowdlerizing them down to publication point, I suppose? You'll find the book over the door." And we waited in silence till he had come down the ladder with the book, for neither of us would have thought of taking a Poet into our confidence. When he landed, he blew the dust off the book-top and slapped it to, and then said, "He's such an uncherrytable Pater mine is!" adding with a gush that was distasteful to me, "But he's a good Pater, and a *dear* Pater!" as if I was likely to dispute it. "Only there's one thing he does *not* understand, and that's Art."

"I suppose I don't, Joey," murmured the Doctor, meekly. "Shut the door when you go out."

Beppino replaced the ladder, and was outside when the Doctor resumed the conversation.

"Naturally any one like me, to whom the idea of extinction at death is absolutely indigestible, would wish or hope for the survival of our affections on the other side. But no change is *inconceivable* to me, only cessation. Still it does seem the most obvious and probable thing that such an incident as this fire, even if we become over there insensible to matter as we are here to spirit, would be seen reflected in the minds of Spirits in the flesh by—shut the door, Joe, and either come in or out!"

The Poet came in, "Eh say," said he. "Thet's intrasting! Who's been on fire?"

"The factory was burned down two days ago—both factories—my Father's works and mine."

"By Jove—thet's serious—anybody killed?"

"Nobody but a dog." Beppino's face fell. "But my Father had a nasty fall, and is laid up."

"By Jove—thet's bad!" He distinctly brightened. "Any chance of incendiarism?" he enquired, anxiously.

"None whatever, Joey," said his Father. "Nothing the least tragic or poetical. Just a big bonfire and nothing else. Nobody's even ruined, as insurance covers everything."

"Pater's always hard on me," said he. And I am confident that he utilized the genuine dejection he felt at the prosaic nature of the disaster as a means of expressing sympathy. "But I say—you know—it's no laughing matter." We admitted that it was not, and he then revived his drooping spirits by admiring the Fire Brigade. "By Jove, they're fine!" he exclaimed. "It's grand! It's grand! I'd have given something to be there to see it."

"*We* didn't enjoy it particularly. I'm sorry you weren't there."

"By Jove! Ha—ha! that's not bad! But you're always seveah on me, Juvence—you really are!"

"I say, Joe," said the Doctor, "I'll walk over with you when we've had some lunch, and see your Father. I don't like the account of him." It was Beppino's misfortune to rub inartistic people the wrong way, and he had done so in this instance. We were not sorry to hear that if he did not run at once he would be late to lunch somewhere else, so we lauded punctuality and gave him a cordial send-off. We had only Aunt Izzy for company.

Before we started for Chelsea it transpired that our communications to Aunt Izzy about the Fire had failed to reach her understanding. She had conceived them to relate to the library fire. Getting it out had become letting it out, and the blow-up of the gas been referred to the bellows.

These errors were discovered and set right when she remarked that she didn't think it "ought to surprise" anybody; and this was traced back to "London Water Supplies." As soon as she realized the conflagration, she became so anxious that the new Apopempsopyrotechnicon Fire-Extinguisher should be used to extinguish it that she ignored the fact that it was out already. I promised to have one at hand next time, and said I hoped I should soon have an opportunity of testing its merits. Aunt Izzy got quite cheerful over this prospect, and augured great success. She was a good-hearted old lady, but wanted to have her finger in every pie. I don't think I've remembered the apparatus right, but it doesn't matter.

The Doctor and I walked over to Chelsea talking of the subject Beppino had interrupted. The fog had lifted and a thaw was setting in. The wind was thinking of coming from the southwest, and a little came as we crossed Clapham Common. When a sudden mild fit of this sort comes in midwinter, people are ungrateful and call it unseasonable, and pretend they like frost. They are liars and hypocrites, as they enjoy it thoroughly. *We* did, on this walk, but we paid our tribute to orthodox views nevertheless.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A CONFERENCE AND A GROWING ALARM. HOW THE WHISKEY-BOTTLE HAD CAUSE TO CHUCKLE. THE CHEQUE-BOOKS DID IT, OF COURSE—WANTED THIRTY-THOUSAND POUNDS. ALSO HOW A BANK SMASHED—AND HOW A BIG BAD DEBTOR OWED A BIG BAD DEBT. CHRISTOPHER VANCE & CO. INSOLVENT.

We arrived, Dr. Thorpe and I, almost at the same moment as Hickman in a Hansom, from the other direction. He was evidently appreciating the change, but he too paid his tribute to public opinion and said it was unhealthy and relaxing and so forth. Missis was out, and Mrs. Christopher was out, but Mr. Vance could get at the bell quite easy. The connection of ideas was quite clear to me. I hope no one will ever be puzzled by it.

We all went straight up to my Father's room; I only going in first cautiously to make sure he was awake. He was. "Who have you got outside?" he asked. "Is that 'Ickman?"

"It's Hickman," I said. "And it's the Doctor come to have a look at you. Not *that* sort of Doctor, Dad! It's Dr. Thorpe."

A look of apprehension vanished, and his face lighted up with pleasure. "There's Doctors and Doctors," said he as he stretched out a hand of welcome. "You're *my* sort! None of your dam prescriptions! Come in, 'Ickman. You all right? See you d'rectly!" The Doctor said don't let him interrupt business and was told Hickman would do any time.

"This is a bad job, Vance," said he, sitting down.

"What you might call a pretty how-do-you-do," said my Father. "But Lord, this ain't nothing! Soon shove this to rights." This seemed to assign less force to a favourite phrase of his than I had always ascribed to it. Dr. Thorpe laughed, and said he was glad it wasn't an ugly how-do-you-do.

"I wouldn't go so far, for one," said my Father. "Suppose we say an unpleasant circumstance, and let it go at that?" This was carried *nem. con.* "If it wasn't for this here sprained ankle I've got in my back, we should be all clear for a start. It's what they call a cash-you-ality—nowise worse than that! It might have been a smashuality, hay, Doctor?"

"That's the right way to look at it, Vance, anyhow."

"Let's ring the bell for tea," said my Father. "Tea and a pipe! That's my soothin' mixture." He reached for the bell-pull, but the sprained ankle was too predominant in his back, and he was glad to leave the bell-pulling to Dr. Thorpe, who volunteered.

"I suppose," said the latter, "you'll soon have all your men at work again, and rebuilding started."

"That's just the advantageous p'int," said my Father. "You ask any Architect (that *is* an Architect, and not an armatoor) which is the best, a built buildin' or a rebuilt buildin', and he'll speak up for the last. Because he'll know he's been detected and convicted of a thousand blunders in the first building that he could have just as well as not kept off of, and the parties won't stand 'em a second time. Excepting he has a 'igh feeling of professional dignity, and can't be lectured."

"And what do you do with him then, Vance?"

"Then you chucks him, or dispenses with his services. If by letter, the latter. But of course that's 'Ickman's department. He walks into 'em 'ansum, and remains their obedient servant per pro. Don't you, 'Ickman?"

"Certainly, Sir. And no doubt the new buildings will be a great improvement. There's nothing like experience. But the first thing will be to——"

But Hickman was interrupted by the arrival of the tea, and also of Janey and my stepmother.

"Oh, we're not fretting, Dr. Thorpe," said my wife, in response to enquiry and expression of sympathy. "The whole thing is covered by Insurance, and it's merely a question of time. Jack was saying he knew of no reason why they shouldn't start next week."

I glanced at Hickman. "Oh yes, of course," said he, "no reason whatever! At least none that I know of."

Was there a note of hesitation? I decided that there was none. It was only that I was fanciful. After all, my nerves *had* been very much shaken in these three last days. Janey went on talking to Dr. Thorpe.

"Now, wasn't that odd, Doctor, that presentiment your daughter in India had? Of course it was a long time before. But then they all say that time doesn't count."

"Who say?"

"Well—the proper people. I don't exactly know who they are."

"No more do I. Shall I pass your cup for some more tea, Vance?" My Father had drunk his straight off, contrary to precedent, and said decidedly, "No, thank you—not another cup." The two ladies looked surprised, and Pheener said, "Now, think of that."

"What was 'Ickman saying just now?" he continued. "Yes—just now—saying to the Nipper?"

"Hickman said nothing to me, dear Dad, except that he knew of no reason why the rebuilding shouldn't begin next week."

"No more there ain't any reason. There's some 'umbuggin' forms to be what they call complied with at the Insurance Offices—but that's nothin'. We can begin to-morrow. As for the Offices, blest if I know what the forms are! You show 'em the receipts, 'Ickman—they'll square the rest."

"I understood," said Hickman, visibly uncomfortable, "that the receipts were with you, Mr. Vance. If so, they are no doubt burned."

"And pumpin' on 'em now," rejoined my Father, "would only be wastin' good water. Nobody wants 'em! If the cash had been sent 'em in coppers, they could put their 'ands in their pockets and say they never had 'em. But a cheque's a cheque, and there you are!"

"Oh, certainly, Sir," said Hickman. "Your recollection of writing the cheques would be quite enough in practice. Only when one makes a formal claim one likes to have the documents."

Dr. Thorpe, whose voice sounded cheerful and reassuring on the top of a sense of misgiving that had crept in, remarked on the admirable service the crossed cheque rendered to business men. "In this case, you see," said he, "payment of cheque makes the whole thing secure without more formality. I'm sure we needn't feel uneasy," addressing my wife, who was looking blank and apprehensive.

But the semi-tension, that had come into the conversation, no one could say exactly when or how, had got to reassurance point. It was like pretending a toothache isn't coming. It showed in my Father's raised voice when he next spoke.

"All I know is," said he, "that I wrote the cheque for all three Offices, and if they haven't sent the receipts it's their lookout!" He said it quite easily and confidently. "Besides, if they didn't receive 'em, how could they cash 'em? You look in the Pass-book—in the pigeonhole of that table. We've got to overhaul that table, Nipper."

The Pass-book was got out and searched. No such cheques were entered. My Father gave a short low whistle, but did not lose his head. "You look again," said he. "You'll find 'em! All the cheques are in order in the second dror' on the right. I put 'em to their numbers myself and none was missin'. You 'unt in my pocket for the keys."

Hickman, whose voice showed his alarm plainly, began speaking. "You shut up a minute, 'Ickman," said my Father. "Let's have them keys." And the keys were found, and the presented cheques, all in order—but no Insurance cheques!

The suspense was trying. "What was Mr. Hickman going to say just now?" asked Dr. Thorpe.

"I was saying, Sir," said Hickman, who may have been a little hurt at being shut up, "that probably Mr. Vance would remember there was a delay in payment. The last day of grace had passed—that was October the fourteenth—and two of the offices wrote to ask if you wished to discontinue, and a gentleman called from the Globe to see if it was an oversight. And when I told you, you said you would send at once."

"Then it's all a fuss about nothin'," said my Father. "I wrote the cheques in the big cheque-book at the Orfice. You wrote 'em and I signed 'em."

"No, Sir, no," said Hickman, who had become quite tremulous. "If you remember that book had been written full up for you to sign, and it was too late then for you to get another. It was six o'clock. And your cheque-book you carry was just used up too! We noticed the coincidence. I wanted you to make the drafts on office paper and not wait for a cheque-book, but you said you would be sure to recollect."

"Stop a bit," said my Father. "I remember something about that." Hickman had a gleam of hope. He went on speaking.

"You'll remember too, Sir, remarking that you had two new cheque-books in the desk at home and you'd post them off that evening. I knew the money would be accepted really any time as long as the place wasn't burned—and I asked you and you said you had sent it—and of course I thought you had the receipts."

I had seen Pheener's hand catching convulsively on the arm of the chair she sat in. As Hickman finished she gave a cry.

"Oh, Master, Master! It was that book the bottle was spilt on!"

"Perhaps," I struck in—a light breaking on me, "you spilt ink over the cheques, and meant to write them again and forgot it. You say, Dad, you remember actually writing the cheques?"

"Ac-tu-ally writin' of 'em, Nipper dear! And putting of 'em in envelopes, and lickin' of 'em to, and putting on the di-rections. Quite like 'Ickman. I can't say I remember forgetting to post 'em, but then some one else may have forgotten. Only Miss Dowdeswell didn't say I spilt the ink. Speak up, little Clementina, and say what it was I spilt!"

"Oh, Master! You know it was the Whiskey. And you said what a good job it was there was so little left in the bottle! And then you finished what little *was* left. But I do remember the cheques were all written by then, and safe in the envelopes. I don't know where you put them—I went away to bed."

"You see, Nipper dear," said he, turning to me with a ridiculous mixed expression of contrition and candour, "you see what it was? It was my intemperate 'abits. Your Daddy was in a state of beastly intoxication. Entirely doo to his 'abits! I'd wrote the cheques though!"

"Come, Vance," said Dr. Thorpe, "you can't have been so very bad, or you couldn't have written them."

"If I'd only drunk a little more the bottle wouldn't have slopped over and spoiled that cheque-book. I remember it now. Fifty to order and three wrote. Three and eleven pence. What's Mrs. Nipper grubbed out of the desk 'ole?"

"What on earth are these?" cried Janey at this moment. She had been fishing about in the pigeonholes of the desk-table. "Three letters and all directed to Fire Insurance Offices!" And turned as white as a sheet.

It was too true! And the explanation, so far as the unposted letters went, was easy. My Father had put them in a safe place, so as to be sure not to forget them. Which of us has not done this, even in our lowest stages of intoxication? But I almost wished the letters had perished in the fire—it would have taken so much blame off my Father's shoulders. It would not have mattered if we had never known how the non-payment escaped detection.

What had exactly happened was this. My Father, as he was consuming rather more than his allowance of whiskey after dinner, on the day of the occurrence described by Hickman, had got out the two new cheque-books mentioned and baptized one of them (so he said) with three premiums payable to the three offices. Having done so, he unfortunately baptized it still further by spilling the whiskey-bottle over it. Now whiskey on certain paper produces a fine purple stain, and my Father noticed the splendour of the tint; and inferring that any one who got a cheque so stained would ascribe Bacchus to the drawer, had put this cheque-book aside to reclaim the price of the stamps if ever he should withdraw his account. We found it in a drawer of the table. Having done this he inaugurated his *other* cheque-book, which was intact, and by the time he had his pass-book again had forgotten all about it. He satisfied himself that all his cheques had been presented by putting them in order, without examining the pass-book. "Where's the good," he said afterwards, "when the entries are all *eligible?*" And he showed me an illegible entry in proof. It was (as near as I recollect) "Dry—£40. 0. 0" and was supposed to commemorate a payment of forty pounds to Rebekah and John Zimmerman, Dry-salters! With respect to the other point, the way the non-appearance of the receipts was acquiesced in, it was clear that the Works had imputed them to the Office, and *vice versa*. Hickman had supposed my Father had got them. And he, not receiving them, naturally inferred they had been sent to Jobchurch Lane, which was his usual designation of the town offices.

To complete this part of the story now. Some attempt was made to get a concession from the Fire Offices on the ground that the written cheques were actually an instruction to Vance & Co.'s bankers to pay the premiums, and that the position was virtually the same as if the cheques had been posted and had not reached. In such a case I believe most offices would have treated the payment as effected. But the legal advisers in our case pointed out that there was nothing but my Father's word to show that these cheques were not written after the fire broke out! If such a precedent were created, said they, it would invalidate the whole principle of Insurance, of which the essence is that the Policy-holder shall risk the loss of his premium; which Vance & Co. had certainly not done while the cheques remained in their possession. Even then I believe one or two of the Directors were in favour of sending my Father the cash (a mere trifle of £30,000 or so); partly because of the glory of such action to the Offices, and partly because Vance & Co. was alleged to have been drunk—chiefly the latter.

Some one thing (I have said this before somewhere) always starts out clear in one's memory, and throws its kin into the background. This time it is Dr. Thorpe's eyes, as I part from him at the gate—full of sympathy, and so like Lossie's. "It's not the money. Doctor," I say to him. "That's bad—but it's not that." And he replies, "*I* know, dear Joe! *I* see. But keep a good heart, and leave it in God's hands." And he walks away into the thaw, by this time in full swing.

And then I go up to the drawing-room and find Janey. And I am in time for her to cry upon, just as the relief of tears comes. And she says, "Oh! Jack, Jack—your poor old Daddy! And he is so sorry. It makes one cry to see him." And she has a good cry, and is the better for it. And then as she comes back to dry land out of a sea of tears, she says, "But wasn't it strange, Jack?" I ask what, and she says what Lossie Desprez wrote in her letter, and that it must have been just when the cheque-muddle came off. And I say coincidence, and all the proper things, and we go upstairs together to get and give consolation. And then Bony comes in and has to be overwhelmed in his turn.

It need not be supposed that an annulled Insurance, or rather a neglected one, was the cause of the Insolvency of Christopher Vance & Co. It was a contributary cause doubtless, and if it had not existed, very likely Vance & Co. would have tided over the other difficulties that came upon them. For misfortunes never come singly, and scarcely was the reconstruction of the burnt Workshops put in hand than another calamity followed. The draft on the Surburban and Metropolitan Joint-Stock Bank, which provided the first weekly screw of the workmen on the job, was the last cheque cashed across the counter of the Clapham and West Brixton Branch of that great and prosperous concern. Next day's morning papers announced its suspension, and in a few weeks any one who was of a sanguine disposition was at liberty to believe that its assets exceeded Golconda, while, on the other hand, incredulity itself was silent when its liabilities were quoted at very little less. One of the causes of failure was ascribed by the Co. to its inability to withstand the temptation to make advances, though it could not exonerate the other parties. Like Browning's young man, whom the young lady never should have looked at so, had she meant he should not love her, the Bank complained that the numerous Firms to which it had lent money, or allowed to overdraw, never should have misled them by depositing such seeming valuable securities, which turned out worthless. Among the overdrawers, C. Vance & Co. was a conspicuous instance, figuring for a good round sum among the Debtors. But, to do my Father justice, his Firm had never made eyes at the Bank, or any Bank. It was merely that no one ever dreamed of questioning his Solvency. But now the luck had turned, and myriads of persons, it seemed, had said so all along.

Even if the Bank had been able, by a great effort of imagination, to realize its assets, Vance & Co. would have been none the better, as at least the account would have had to be balanced, before new overdraws could be indulged in. But the worst was to come. My Father had undertaken, as a sub-contract from an eminent firm of Railway Contractors, the construction of a great Hotel at a Terminus. It was to be paid for when completed, at the opening of the Railway. But everything, as my Father said, went contrairy. The building-site proved to be a spongy morass, which had indurated itself spitefully at all the points which were tested, and which had to be turned into a huge block of concrete before a footing could be laid. This cost within ten thousand pounds of the contract sum. Nevertheless, the whole thing was completed in spite of difficulties, and payment was due, when crash went the great Contractors!

There is no better investment now, in this last year but four of the century, than shares in that Railway, if you can get them! Many a prosperous family has been reared and educated on them, many a luxurious country-house built. Quotation of them at a premium has become a mechanical habit with Brokers, who mostly believe that if they fell the sky would. But the men who fought with unexpected torrents in the tunnels, with malignant hillsides that waited for passing trains and then developed as landslips, with huge seas that came in the night and swept away Cyclopean walls as Betsy Austin sweeps away the crumbs—these men died in poverty or small prosperity, or lived, some of them, to furnish illustrations of the advantages of marriage settlements, and of their own wicked improvidence, from the consequences of which the greater foresight of everybody else had saved them. For those who fail get scant quarter from those who never try, and those who see no farther than the stock-market know of no success outside the Balance-Sheet.

My Father got a good deal of public absolution. For, though the Bankrupt did not ascribe any of his failure to that whiskey-bottle that I saw chuckling in triumph over the ruin of his home, yet it leaked out, through the men, that Christopher had undeniably been concerned, on the day of the fire, in liquor, and that he was liable at other times to be concerned in other liquor. And nobody could deny that he was a jolly good fellow. So, even as the rank and file of an army that has been led to slaughter by a tipsy General forgives him with its dying breath, so the workman whose employment was gone spoke leniently of my poor old Dad; and forgiveness got into the atmosphere, and excuse-making was the rule and censure the exception. But his blame of himself and his weight of sadness were pitiful to see, as he lay helpless on his back, the victim a second time of the same injury, and a second time being forcibly weaned from his old bad habit.

That was my consolation, and, though none of us ever by any chance spoke about it, *our* consolation. Each knew what the others thought.

I go on to a time—it was well on in the late summer—when all the business matters were wound up, not unsatisfactorily on the whole. In winding up a concern of this sort, the final settlement turns on the common interest of the creditors, and in this case there was no doubt about the interest common to all, namely the success of Vance & Macallister, who figured as debtors to Christopher Vance & Co. But the terms of their building contract had been cash payment on completion. Bony and I were therefore able to demand completion, and the Firm, now represented by its Creditors and an Official Receiver, carried out the building as per contract. Easy terms of payment were granted, the good-will of the business being accepted as a sufficient security; and a friendly mortgage of the buildings started us on our way, and though somewhat handicapped we could fairly look forward to prosperity. I feel this is all prolix, but when no one reads, an author may be as prolix as he likes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

JOE'S FATHER DOES NOT IMPROVE MUCH. BUT HE IS HIS OLD SELF STILL, AND ENJOYS A SURPRISE HE HAS TREASURED FOR HIS FAMILY. HOW HE HAD BOUGHT A TRINKET IN BOND STREET. THE NEW LIMITED CO. IT STARTS ILL; BUT GOOD FORTUNE BRINGS BACK AN OLD BOARD TO HELP THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

My memory, then, travels on satisfied to late in an evening in August, 1870, when I was sitting with my Father in the drawing-room at Chelsea, looking out at the moonlight on the river. For great ingenuities had provided ways to move and carry him without pain. "Progress," said his enemy, the Medical Man, "was slow but sure." "Then why don't he get out o' the way," said the patient, "and let me get ahead a little quicker?" An eminent surgeon had examined him, but said there was nothing for it but patience. "No, Mr. Vance," said he to me as we parted at the street door. "I can't take a fee for telling a man to lie on his back. You take an interest in bullets, of course? I'm just going to take one out of a man. Too old-fashioned a one for you to care about. It's been thirty years in his carcase!" And ran away to avoid my thanks.

"How long was I getting round, that time, Joey?" said my Father to me on this evening. "That time after poor Peter Gunn got the glass in his eye."

You mustn't suppose these words brought that event back to me then nearly as clearly as it does to you now. You have, I presume, recently read it. I remember it vividly now, fifty years after! It was rather hazy after twenty.

"I think Mother said two months," said I. "All I recollect is that day you came out in front and we talked to the little man with the board."

"Just such another day as this has been! More by token it was the Nipper's birthday! What's to-day, Joe?"

"Nineteenth. I say, Janey, yesterday was my birthday and we forgot it!" Janey was writing a letter within calling distance. "Many happy returns," said she, "but to-day's the eighteenth."

"Well, then," said I, "it's to-day!" And Janey came in and gave me a kiss, for confirmation, and went back to her writing.

"I remember," said I. "You gave me a top to play Peg-in-the-Ring with Porky."

"And your Mother a pair o' storkins," said he. "Your feet are larger now than they was in them days, Joey."

"*Who* did you say you played Peg-in-the-Ring with?" intermitted Janey from afar, without stopping writing.

"Porky Owls," answered I. And Janey said "What a name!" and soaked back into her letter.

"Well, Joey," said my Father, resuming. "It was two months, anyhow—maybe a bit more! And how long have we been goin' on over this job? 'Tain't a twelvemonth yet, if we speak the truth." He had evidently begun his comparisons of the two nursings hoping for better results, but was not going to acknowledge defeat. It was discouraging to think how long he had been on his back.

"Can't be helped, Nipper, can it?" He effaced the unpleasant view of the case, and took a more cheerful one. "One good thing, at any rate—it's out of the question gratifyin' one's unfortunate propensities. Or if it ain't out of the question it's out of the answer, when one's domestic circle grabs the bottles and bolts."

"Never mind, Dad! It's my birthday to-day, so you shall have extra toddy." And I promised to compound a nightcap *secundum artem*—feeling rather as if I was compounding a felony. I felt guilty and apologized to Mrs. Christopher, who appeared at this moment. "It's your lookout, M'Joseph," said she. "I wash *my* hands." Her difficulties in addressing me often ended as if I were a Basuto. "Comes of her having been a young gal," was my Dad's explanation. It is intelligible to me—perhaps to you also?

Bony and Jeannie often looked in late, and did so now. They had been out dissipating, and Jeannie looked like a Titian portrait of a grand duchess. Janey arranged her beautifully for us to look at, with the full moon over the river behind her. She was a glorious spectacle sitting there in the clash of the moonlight and lamplight. "Not bad!" said her husband, in the tone of a satisfied proprietor of a travelling circus. We settled down to a general chat over things, telling Jeannie she might move now if she liked. And Janey said we might talk business, if we wanted to, and of course we immediately did so.

"Well, Bony," said I. "It's really all done now!"

"Are you sure?" said he. "It's been really all done at least three times in the last three months!"

"Anyhow, I can see the Bankrupt's certificate sticking out of his pocket," said I. And my Father, perceiving that this was the case, buttoned it in. It had been a great satisfaction to him to read it at intervals, and it seemed not improbable that he would always retain it in his pocket. He had been greatly pleased to know that he had made a full discovery of his estate and effects. I think he felt like Christopher Columbus, or Cortez.

"Now are you quite sure you haven't concealed property to the amount of ten pounds?" I asked.

"Quite sure," he answered. "The property I concealed was a considerably bigger amount than ten pounds. Besides, it wasn't my property, it was Miss Dowdeswell's."

We all stared at him and each other. He continued.

"They never asked me if I had concealed any one else's property."

"What are you driving at, Daddy dear?"

"You get Miss Dowdeswell to show you that fancy article I gave her afore ever she suggested Matrimony. You tell truth and shame the Devil, Mrs. V. Cut upstairs and fetch it down. I should like to see some of you gals try it on."

It dawned upon me that he was referring to the parcel he had given his wife when I brought it from the burning house. It had slipped my memory in all the confusion and anxiety, and it was now eight months ago. I made a remark to this effect, and he said, "Yes—it was that parcel I had the Optical Delusion about." His wife returned with it, and handed it to him.

"Now, Mrs. Christopher Vance, as I said before, you tell truth and shame the Devil. How did you come by this here parcel?"

"You gave it me, dear, at the fire—in Slack's front parlour."

"And how did I come by it?"

His wife reflected, and said, "Why—I suppose—I gave it to you to take care of, after you gave it to me the first time."

"Of your own free will?"

"Yes. Because you said, 'You do as I tell you, little Clementina, and give me back that parcel of your own free will, for me to take care of for you.' So I gave it you of my own free will."

"Good girl! If you'd given it me under compulsion it would have spiled the performance."

While this conversation was going on, my Father undid the parcel. All our eyes were fixed on it. Out of cotton-wool came an inner parcel of pink tissue paper, and out of that a casket of red morocco leather.

"*That's* all right!" said he. "Suppose now we put it away to be safe." But a chorus of indignant exclamation followed. "It's *your* property, Mrs. Christopher," said Bony. "You take it from him." And she did so. And opened it.

As I sit here writing this, much disturbed because Upstairs is moving out to-day, and a sort of beery persons who come out of the rain and smell damp and stuffy are hoarsely percolating through the house, engaged in the removal of Upstairs' furniture, and a wardrobe (which gives the impression of being also a wardbugs) is giving a practical illustration of the maxim that wot's been got in can be got out, and she'll come if you keep her round easy. You don't, it seems, for she comes with a smash against my door. But she is got out, with one of her four feet off, and she dies away into a van in a drizzle, and her foot is carried down after and stuffed inside her.

What were the memories this accursed and useless article of furniture interrupted? A memory of a flood of reflected light from a jewel-cluster in the satin lining of a leather box, a miniature constellation of a thousand reflected moons and a thousand reflected lamps. A memory of the cry of joy of the voices I knew so well, so many years ago. A cry of sheer joy at the splendour. A memory of my Father rolling about with laughter at the great surprise, till he hurt himself, and had to stop.

I shall pick up the thread of my narrative now, provided always that Upstairs subsides. I think I hear those beery ones in the street spreading, if not their sheeny van for flight, at any rate their sheeny tarpaulins over it. . . . Yes! And the carman has said wup to awaken the horse from his reverie, and they are off!

"Stick it on your head, Miss Dowdeswell," said my Father. "You won't know yourself, you'll look such a beauty."

"There now," said Jeannie, "that's just the way you men talk about your wives."

"Nobody else has any wives, or they might talk about 'em sim'lar," said he. "You give her a lift, Mrs. Nipper. She ain't a dab!"

And after Mrs. Christopher had tried it on, Mrs. Nipper did. But these were really only civilities, the public anxiety to see it on Mrs. Macallister being ill-concealed. The result, when it came, was stupendous, and the wearer kept it on, with a not unmixed philanthropy.

"They can't be real, of course," said Janey.

"Of course not," said my Father, placidly. "Just a lot o' bits of stinkin' glass." But this statement immediately aroused suspicion.

"Then some of them are—really real!" said Janey. Solely because of the statement that none of them were so! "Why, they may be worth hundreds! What's that big one in the middle worth?"

"Couldn't say. But they're worth more than ten pounds, all told. So the Lord Chancellor can keep his hair on."

"They must be worth a good deal, Mr. V.," said his wife. "Wouldn't it be better to sell 'em and have the money? It would be something, anyhow—and we could pay our fair share of the bills then, perhaps."

"How much should you take it they might be worth?" asked my Father with the air of one who could be persuaded to part with it if a twenty-pound purchaser could be found.

We guessed that amount, some of us, and our guess was disallowed. We guessed double with the same result. We knocked off a third, and then my Father said we were getting colder. Then we doubled again. Same result. Then again. And so on till the guess was two thousand five hundred and odd! Then in order to put an end to the possibility of another rebuff, I exclaimed, "Come now, Daddy! I'll do it this time. Ten thousand pounds!"

"Very likely you're right, Nipper," said my Father, meekly. "Like enough they're only worth that. Always been bein' takin in, all my life, I have! But I *gave* fifteen thousand. You needn't look so scared. I haven't cheated the Lord Chancellor out of twopence."

I suppose we continued looking uneasy, for he went on in a more serious tone of voice.

"They didn't belong to me—they belonged to Miss Dowdeswell. She hadn't so much as mentioned matrimony at that time, much less committed of it. You see this was just how it happened. I was passing by a Jeweller's shop, in Bond Street, and I saw some pretty things in the window, priced various at so much—two hundred this, two hundred that—and I went to look at 'em. And on my remarkin' they went to a pretty penny for Shop-window goods, the shopman says they don't count *them* expensive, and he shows me two or three that ran to more. This was one. They was askin' fifteen thousand eight 'underd. And I told 'em I'd fifteen thousand in my pocket and if they were agreeable we'd deal at that. So I brought it away and put it in my shavin' drawer."

"But how on earth," said I, "did you come to have fifteen thousand in your pocket?"

"It was a cheque Margosian & Mavropoulos had just paid me for that new block of offices we rebuilt in the City—all the cash in a lump. And I was in funds at the time, and it seemed a good investment. I asked 'em not to put *hen hen* upon it. So it was as good as a Bank of England note. I wrote across the back in the shop and they wrote a receipt. There it is, tumbled out of the parcel! Let's have hold of it!" I passed it to him, and he lit a pipe with it.

"Well, now, Pheener," said Janey, "you're quite a rich woman—isn't it nice?"

"It isn't mine! That's only Mr. V.'s nonsense. Of course it's just as much his as ever."

"Don't you go sayin' that in the hearin' of the Lord Chancellor," said my Father. "He'll ree-scind the certificate, and make use of it to square off that odd four shillins in the pound. Besides sendin' me to prison for concealing valuable assets. It 'll bring you in a nice little penny, and you'll be able to afford your elderly encumbrance a trifle of barker. Dear—dear! What a many times I've said to myself that we need never go to the work'us as long as we'd got the Tiarrhoea—— Well! You may laugh as much as you like—but that's what the shopman called it—a Tiarrhoea!"

I remember all the above scene, with perfect clearness. Then follows a hazy period in which I recollect facts, without images or visible incident to confirm them. The fact, for instance, that most of the creditors of C. Vance & Co. became shareholders in C. Vance & Co. Ltd., Managing Director, Mr. William Hickman. Also that my Father bought shares therein in his wife's name with a good deal, I forget how much, of the eighteen thousand pounds for which he sold the tiara to the Duchess of Playbridge, whose second husband (I can't remember his name) negotiated the sale and accepted a commission of ten per cent. and lost it all next day on the turf.

It is extraordinary how much one does forget! I can recollect nothing particular of the Limited Co.'s beginnings (although I must have known all about them at the time) until more than a year after the sale of the tiara. Hickman came to see my Father, and was "glad to say matters were looking much better." His recent visits had been penitential as to his own mishaps and censorious of other people's. As I was seeing him downstairs I remember his saying to me, "Oh, by-the-bye, Mr. Joseph, I forgot to tell Mr. Vance that! You remember Shaw, our old gate-office man? He called last week for a chance, and of course I put him on. That was a very good place Mr. Vance got him, but he fell out with them because they sacked a man for being drunk in his overtime—the overtime having been unexpected. It *was* rather a shame! Well! Shaw came off the job, on principle, and came back to us. And he brought me round, to show me, a relic he saved out of the old fire! You'll recollect the board that stood inside the Gate-office? With your Father's name on it, and Drains Attended To? Shaw said he wouldn't part with it on any terms, and I had to go to two pounds ten to get him to give it up. But I've got it now in the Office in Abchurch Lane, and it's a good deal thought of."

CHAPTER XXXIX

JOE'S FATHER SLIPS DOWNHILL. PETER GUNN CROPS UP. AND AT LAST OLD VANCE KNOWS THE STORY OF THE BOTTLE-END. HE REACHES THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL, AND GOES ELSEWHERE. BUT THE BOARD IS STRONG AND PHEENER IS DESERVEDLY RICH, AND ALL IS WELL. SO JOE HAS TIME FOR REMINISCENCE, AND REMEMBERS HOW HE MET PORKY OWLS AGAIN, AND DIDN'T KNOW HIM.

MY Father cannot be said to have ever really rallied. The occasion I described in the previous chapter is one of the last I can call to mind when he seemed quite like his dear old contradictious self. So said his wife. He had light fluctuations, as when for instance his Doctor announced that complication with Kidneys was to be feared. "As if," said he indignantly, "I was a beefsteak puddin'!"

But whether it was liver or kidneys or heart or lungs, or that refuge of destitute Diagnosis, a complication, was never determined. All that was quite clear was that the injury to the spine had come to stay. Diagnosis would have it that something else was responsible, but never made up its mind to say exactly what. Treatment seemed to have only one instinct—namely, to head him off from any nourishment he felt a special wish for. As the effect of interdicting anything whatever was to make him refuse food till he got it, the only chance of diet was for every one else to adopt it as well as the patient. Unfortunately, he soon saw through this, and refused tea unless it had, in addition to its own natural sugar, all the sugar there ought to have been in that beastly plain pudd'n at lunch. The moment he found out that we were living on triumphs of insipidity with an eye to his welfare, he revolted, and underwent agonies of starvation until we surrendered at discretion. "What's under this here cover now?" he would say. "Is it nutritious diet? Because if so, you may give it to the cat. If it's food which would be fatal in my case, you may take the cover off." And off came the cover accordingly. "As for how many lumps o' sugar in the toddy, how many has the Doctor strictly limited 'em to? One? Is that all? We'll go two better than that and strictly limit 'em to three, and then if that don't satisfy him, nothing will." But examples of skilful perversion of this sort became fewer and farther between, until at last, the Doctor having admitted that nothing was to be gained by fidgeting him about diet, it ceased to be a bone of contention. And as very few or no other bones presented themselves, there ensued a calm, of which we all knew the meaning, and we felt that the end was in sight.

It may have been some months before his death that he said that about the three lumps of sugar. I was concocting his toddy at about midnight, the beginning of the only time when he was at all wakeful—for even in this he was contradictious, sleeping all day and getting restive between twelve and one in the morning. I had given in, and allowed the three lumps, and was just going to leave the tumbler in his hands, when it slipped and was broken on the floor. "Don't cut your fingers pickin' of it up, Nipper," said he. The mishap was soon remedied, and he lay back sipping the second concoction.

"I wonder," said he, "what's become of poor Peter Gunn." I should have thought this had come into his mind out of the blue, only that Peter had come into mine too. It was the broken glass.

"Ah—I wonder!" said I. "And I wonder what's become of Porky Owls and Gummy Harbuttle."

"I don't wonder about them. Because they was young, and likely to go on by nature. But poor Peter was gettin' on, and he might be either a Corpse or a Ghost, accordin' as you look at it." I really had never credited my Daddy with thinking on this subject, and this speech of his presented very strongly to me his singular faculty for boiling down a subject and wrapping it up. I am borrowing his own expression, used once long ago over a specification.

"Of course," I replied. "Peter may have been dead years ago."

"Which should you suppose Peter was now—a Corpse or a Ghost?" I inclined to the latter, with reservations.

"Which would you soonest be, Nipper?"

"What's your own idea, Dad?"

"A Ghost, of course! Think how you could go about frightenin' timid females. I'd sooner be one or t'other, square and fair, than a Ghost in a Corpse, which is my feelins at present. If I was a Ghost, at any rate I could go and frighten Peter Gunn, if still livin'. I'd like to be even with him. But p'r'aps it would be 'eapin' up, as the poor beggar lost his eye."

I recollected that my Father had never known what boy threw the bottle-end. It would please him to know now. "I say, Daddy," said I.

"What, Nipper?"

"Guess who threw that glass at Peter Gunn."

"That Police-Orficer—his name was Parrish or Purvis, or Ricketts—some such a name—said it was two young customers with no boots out of Trapp's Rents—a little this way of the Canal Bridge. Said he saw them aim the glass and hook it."

"He saw them hook it, but he didn't see them aim the glass. *I* saw them hook it. Let me fill you up the pipe."

He puffed at his pipe, looking dreamily at the "Stags without Words" (the name had caught on), which had been hung handily for him to see. I thought he was forgetting about Gunn. But he wasn't, he was only guessing. Presently he said:

"Your Mother she made out it was match-factory or soap-bilin' boys from Garrett Green way. But fancy the Nipper seeing 'em—poor little Nipper his bad old Dad ran off and left! Why, Joey boy, you wasn't up to my hand!"

"I was big enough to throw a bottle-end, and I did it. And I hit Mr. Gunn, and you should have heard him howl. And then I was afraid to tell of it, till I forgot all about it."

Anything like the dumb amazement of my Father I have never seen. It made him gasp and feel for words without finding them. At last he got at his voice. "My Nipper," said he, "*my* Nipper—the little Nipper!" And for some minutes he found nothing else to say.

"Yes," I said, "I hit him, and I wasn't sorry. Only I was afraid he'd crack me like the insect, so I never told anybody—not even Mother!"

"Not even Mother! Oh, Joey boy, I shall die even with poor Peter Gunn—and your Mother never knew it! Oh, Joey, Joey!" And the tears ran down his face, as he repeated again and again, "Oh, Joey, Joey! Your dear Mother!" It was entirely on her behalf that he felt it so keenly. After a while he said, speaking as one reverting to his own view of the case. "It don't so much matter on *my* account, in the manner of speaking. I'm very sorry for poor Peter. All the same if one could be awenged on one's enemies without occasioning of 'em personal inconwenience, it would be a satisfaction! But when it comes to eyes!" And then he said again, "Poor Peter," and presently fell asleep.

It was not the last time we spoke of Peter, for he more than once made me tell him all I could recollect of the story over again. He had completely forgotten a number of things that seemed to me vital to the history. For instance, about the insect in the quart-pot! To me it seemed, and still seems, the pivot on which the whole thing centred. All the babies round us now are taking like impressions of little things we do not notice, and will keep them to their dying day.

He slept a good deal, rousing himself a little when we borrowed Jeannie's children to brighten him up a bit. Happily or unhappily, as the case may be (for I have thought both ways, and cannot pronounce), there was no progeny whatever in our establishment. He himself used to regard Jeannie in the light of Mudie's. "When you've none of your own, send to the Circulatin' Libery," was his way of putting it. They were beautiful children, and the little girls used to play at weddings and christenings all in one, but prided themselves on knowing that the christenings always came after the weddings. Their families' busts came off and their insides came out and got all over everything, and their eyes glared hideously into space, and they afforded no satisfaction to a public hungry for kisses, and their mammas complained of being preferred unduly. But they were a happiness to my dear old Dad as he slid gently down the hill, and if I could see those mothers and thank them I should be glad. They are, to the best of my belief, real parents of real children now, and the girls, I conjecture, will soon be old enough for Grandmamma to make matches for. Jeannie, I believe, is very beautiful still, and I have no doubt as keen as formerly at her favourite pastime.

Well, then, my dear old Dad went slowly, slowly down the hill. His wife, variously Pheener, Clementina, Miss Dowdeswell or Mrs. V., was a good woman if ever there was one! You know it is no easy matter to nurse a contradictious patient who cannot raise himself to sit up, far less walk. But she held on to the last, and then when the end came quite gave in and became almost frantic with grief. "Oh, Master Joseph, Master Joseph," she cried, quite forgetting all but the past, "Missis *would* say I did my best. I'm sure she would. But I might have had him a little longer. It need not have been quite the end."

But it was, or at least as much the end as it ever is. The long diminuendo had died down to silence, or to a pause followed by a new movement that we who were left in the silence could not hear.

* * * * * * * *

The firm of Christopher Vance & Co. Ltd. exists no longer under that name, but I am told that at the Offices of the great Company of which it formed the chief constituent, there is still treasured the board which once was the property of the mysterious and vanished C. Dance. Original shares in this Company have doubled in value, and my stepmother, who is living still with a second husband in Worcestershire, is a rich woman and influential. She married, I believe, an old sweetheart, and has several sons and daughters all growing up now. What a deal of room there is for incidents in a quarter of a century! It was four years (apparently) before Pheener would listen to this old sweetheart, and she has had over twenty years of extremely family life since. She asked me to be a trustee of her marriage settlement. But I selfishly (no doubt) refused, it being a case in which I could not be bullied into consenting. For I had had a warning on the subject of Trusteeships, which I shall have to refer to later in this narrative.

After my Father's death all went on as usual. Vance & Macallister throve, and fully justified the faith placed in them by the official assignees of C. Vance & Co. How the disappearance of the payment of fifteen thousand pounds, which ought by rights to have come in somewhere in Vance & Co.'s books, was accounted for, we never knew. But there was no doubt the concern at that time was solvent without it, and my Father had a perfect right to convert it into pocket-money and buy trinkets for any lady he chose to spend it on. I believe it was an unnecessary precaution to make a present of it to Miss Dowdeswell before he was engaged to her, but it showed the degree of his mistrust of law and lawyers. Anyhow, his creditors never raised any question about it, and accepted sixteen shillings in the pound gratefully. Bony and I discharged the principal and interest of our debt for the building rather sooner than was expected, and all went well with us.

Now that I have got thus far in my story I will wait a little and think of something pleasant. I will light this pipe and smoke it in my armchair before the fire, and nobody shall worry me.

I think I shall be unmolested. Unless, indeed, a German gentleman I sometimes play chess with has forgiven me for what he says was the drig I played him. Most players will remember Zukertort's problem which puzzled everybody, and turned on Black's last move having been pawn two squares, and White having the choice of taking across, which was the key-move of the problem. Of course White didn't realize this, and was very angry when he had to give it up! My German was so indignant that he has never been near me since. He said it was the merest jezdrig. I don't think he will forgive me.

What shall I think about that is only pleasant, and that I can bear to think about? Shall I try the wooden carriage-gate at Poplar Villa with five square horizontal bars and one cross-piece, and some vertical thin irons through the three lowest bars, to discourage the passing street dog? It does not hurt me to recall it as it swung to, after my Daddy and I passed through, coming away from that first visit to Poplar Villa. But my mind goes back a little more, and Lossie is running down the front-door steps with a huge piece of cake in her hand for the Boy. No! I will not think of that; it must be something else. I must get quite, quite away—it ought to be so easy for me to do so! I have seen so many places and so many men since those days. I will pick something at random out of my South American time—that row in the streets at Lima which began at a gambling-house down the road, overnight, with savage recrimination in all languages, and rose and fell, and rose and fell, all through the tropical night, and woke me from my first sleep as it burst out and filled the street with stabbings and revolver shots. And then a descent in force of the police, and my going out and penetrating the crowd because I heard so unmistakable an English voice in altercation with the officers. Its owner was explaining that he really had not been concerned in what he quite properly called the bloody row himself, being merely one of the crew of an English ship that had put in at Callao for repairs after bad weather, and who had walked over to see as much Peru as he could, while his leave lasted. I was able to get him out of his mess, and took him to the house I was lodging in, and patched him up, for he was not unscratched. And when I came to talk to him it appeared that his name was Howells, and that when a boy he lived near London—down in the sou'west, nigh to Wimbledon. And will you believe it, it was all so long ago, and life had told so upon each of us, that neither remembered the other? For it was not till after he departed that I suddenly recollected that Stallwood's Cottages were nigh to Wimbledon, though that was not how I located them mentally, and that Porky Owls's real name was Robert Howells. And then I was as sure, when it was too late, that this grizzled seaman of fifty was Porky, as I was of myself having been that small boy who caught newts with him in ponds, and carried them home in pickle-bottles. Of course I was sorry we parted unrevealed, but one can't always have the dramatic and interesting—one has to accept the actual. As an American poet sings, "Oh, darn those things that go and be, without consulting you and me!" I should have liked to have chatted over old times. I might have convinced him of the existence of equilateral triangles—who knows?

But what does my perverse memory run back to now, at his suggestion? Not the ponds and the newts—not the renown at peg-top he was named from—not his contempt of Number and Magnitude. What comes back to me unbidden is the front room at Chelsea, looking over the river. And it is my birthday—and Janey comes from the back room to kiss me—my wife of all those years ago! And what brings this back is her having asked from the back room, two minutes after, for a confirmation of Porky's impossible name.

Perhaps if I think of the earthquake at Lima the next night, and the mad terror of man and beast, all but the fire-flies, who seemed quite unconcerned—perhaps if I think of these I shall be safe from things that come out of the past laden with useless pain. I will try.

Perhaps, however, I will first see who my landlady (a most disagreeable person) is treating with contumely on the stairs. I will go out and listen over the banisters. I suspect it is Herr Pfleiderer, my German chess-friend. It is, and it seems he will vorgiff me that drig, and blay a game, if I will admit that it was a drig, and was not a broplem—in fact, was not jez at all. I am not sorry he has come, and admit everything. And then we have a two hours' game ending in a draw—I avail myself of a perpetual check, or neither of us might get to bed to-night.

CHAPTER XL

THIS CHAPTER IS REALLY ALL DEVOTED TO DR. THORPE'S OPINIONS, ALTHOUGH IT PRETENDS NOT AT THE BEGINNING. BETTER SKIP THEM. A QUOTATION FROM TENNYSON. JANEY AND JOE MAKE EACH A PROMISE TO THE OTHER.

After my Father's death the world went on as usual. The rapid construction of infernal machines of various kinds progressed at the Factory, and pointed to a happy time in the future when, all the able-bodied males of all races having become Casualties, the blessings of peace will accrue to their fellow creatures, until a couple of them are discharged cured and ready to begin again. Mrs. Macallister's next baby came—or stop! Was it her next baby, or the next after that? I really cannot be positive at this length of time. Janey used to borrow a young and juicy one, I know, and gloat over it for hours together. She, poor girl, did not approve of being out of it in this way, and thought Jeannie very greedy for wanting to keep so many to herself. She would gladly have appropriated this one outright. Perhaps it was well, as it turned out, that she never did so.

There is nothing in all this story of any importance that I did not tell to Janey, one time or another, in very nearly the words I have used here. Even that wretched week at Oxford, after Dr. Thorpe went back home and left me to wrestle with my own confusion—even that I told her, without reserve. I should have felt dishonest to keep anything back; and told it all, the best I could. I put my soul in Janey's keeping, with all faults and errors of description, like fish sold by auction at Billingsgate. You could never understand it as she did, even if you existed, which you don't. Still less, I conceive, than she does if she exists now—which is at least as likely as that you ever will, maybe more so! I can remember, one time at Chelsea, how I looked up from writing a letter, and saw at the other side of the table Janey with distinct tears in her hazel eyes, and her chin resting on both hands, looking at me.

"What's the matter, ducky darling?" said I, "you're getting low, and want cheering up. Let's go and see Terriss at the Gaiety; he'll make us laugh!"

"I'm not low! I'm very cheerful. I was only thinking about you, you poor darling silly old Jacky, all by yourself in those rooms at Oxford, crying your eyes out about Lossie Desprez! Wouldn't it be nice now, do be honest and confess, to wake up and find it was all a dream? All, all, all!—up to now, I mean."

"That's too stiff a question to answer off-hand."

"Oh no! Just think—fancy waking up in the morning and writing it all to Lossie! (By-the-bye, you haven't forgotten to post your letter to her, I hope, and mine to the de Pembertons to say we can't come on Monday? *That's* all right!) Well, Jacky dear, what *would* you have said?"

"I should have said there was a young lady in the dream that I loved such a lot of veries that I wished myself asleep again."

"Just like you did Hedwig?"

"Why, no! Hedwig was a dear girl, no doubt, and very pretty, but she was the age of my daughters—the dowdies that they were! Do you know, Jilly darling, I never felt quite sure that girl didn't cosset up to my girls because she was tall and they were short, and she could sing and they could only grunt, like pigs! But they're all squashed now, and it doesn't matter."

"I wonder whether there's a Schloss anywhere that means to come down and squash all in this dream—and which of us is going to do the waking."

"I hope you will! No! darling. I won't be so beastly selfish, I hope *I* shall."

"Are you quite sure you're really there?" asked Janey, with very grave eyes and mouth. "Are you?" said I, and then both agreed we felt pretty certain.

"Well, then," said she, "perhaps when the Schloss comes down we shall both wake together."

"Bother that Schloss!" I exclaimed. "I declare I will *not* be overhung by any such abominable infliction. I'll thank that Schloss to dry up."

"But it would be rather fun to wake together and talk it over, wouldn't it now, Jack?"

"Well—it certainly would!"

"I should so like to know what Dr. Thorpe thinks about such things."

"What things?"

"Bogy things—I shall ask him and make him talk about them next Sunday."

For whatever else changed there was one thing that remained unchanged, and that was an alternate Sunday-evening visit to Poplar Villa. It had got inaugurated when we were first engaged, only it did not occur half-a-dozen times in our first engagement. When we got broken off I resumed my every Sunday, very often going to lunch and stopping all day. Since we got broken on again, as Janey called it, we had alternated a Sunday visit there with a Hampstead one. We used to go to her family on Saturday evening, and stay till Monday.

This particular next Sunday came, and we hansomed over after tea through an alternation of deluge and sun-blaze, on what would have been a glorious April day if it had been the Saturday following, which was April Fool's Day. I remember this because I remember Janey hoaxing me on the way up to Hampstead on that day. She asked me quite seriously, if I was sure I had the ticket in my pocket, and my hand went to my pocket before I remembered that the ticket was not yet taken! It had been settled that we should go to Italy for a holiday, by sea if possible, and I was to enquire about the tickets on the Monday following, in Cockspur Street.

Only Professor Absalom, Dr. Thorpe's old friend, was at Poplar Villa, except ourselves. The Macallisters had been asked, but had declined privately, in conference with me, unless it was guaranteed that Beppino would not be in evidence. As I knew he would, if he heard that Jeannie was coming, I could not press them to accept the Doctor's invitation.

In the course of the evening, as we all sat in the Library, Janey, determined to *entamer* the conversation towards the discussion of what she called Bogy things, referred to a story (I believe it is a very well-known one) of the recovery of some lost leases, which were found as indicated by a clairvoyant in the organ-loft of Exeter Cathedral, having been left there by their owner during a short stay when he officiated as temporary organist. It is a very good story of the sort, and Dr. Thorpe remarked that he classed it among those testimonies which are either impudent lies or conclusive proofs. "Proofs of what?" said Professor Absalom.

"In this case," said the Doctor, "proof that a man's intelligence can go outside his radius. Or else that he can leave his body behind him and carry his intelligence with him. I am speaking," continued he, laughing, "with a painful sense that I do not understand my own words."

A general protest followed against any one keeping silence on that account. "Man is endowed with the faculty of speech," remarked Professor Absalom, "in case any one else should be able to understand him. No reasonable Creator would require that he should be intelligible to himself. If he did he would soon be disillusioned. I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Miss Thorpe—you were just going to say?——" For Aunt Izzy had endeavoured to make an observation.

"I was only saying, Professor, that it surely was very wrong of him to leave all those poor girls in the organ-loft by themselves. Of course, if there was any older or responsible person there it would not matter so much. But just fancy, all night in an organ-loft!"

The Doctor looked at me for a clue, and I looked at Janey. We all shook our heads, as baffled solvers of an enigma. "We must get at it gradually," said he. "Try and elucidate it, Mrs. Joe. She hears your voice pretty well." And Janey shouted into the ear-trumpet, "*What* poor girls, Miss Thorpe?"

"Well—my dear—those girls you said! That man's nieces that he left in the organ-loft."

We were all well trained, and nobody laughed. Janey shouted the correction *"leases, not nieces,"* and Aunt Izzy said, "Of course it's not, but you didn't speak plain. I heard you perfectly this time. Only, why did he have the Police up into the organ-loft?" I pulled out a pocket pencil and wrote *leases,* plainly, on my shirt-cuff and showed it to her. But Aunt Izzy was *navrée* and thought she would go to bed, although it was early, and said good-night and did what she thought. The poor old lady would not accept compulsory silence, and it made conversation difficult.

"Now, Doctor, fire away," said Janey. "You said you would, you know." Which was untrue, but that didn't matter.

"What about?"

"About souls in bodies, and general Bogyism; you know what I mean, and I want to know what you think. No, Doctor, I'm not in joke—I really should like to get you to talk about it—if you don't dislike——"

"I don't the least mind talking about Death and what follows—which I take it is what you mean? My difficulty is to find anything to say, worth saying, that hasn't been said before."

He tapped on his snuffbox as if there might be something worth saying inside, and held it out to Professor Absalom standing on the hearthrug. The Professor took a pinch and sat down on the armchair opposite to enjoy it slowly and sneeze in peace. I filled a pipe and settled down on the rug with my head in Janey's lap.

"You know, Joe," said the Doctor, "I really think your dear

Father touched the root of the matter when he said that about a corpse and a ghost—you remember?" I nodded, and lighted my pipe. "Well! I'm always speculating about *why* I always take Life after Death for granted, while so many people start with extinction, and throw the *onus probandi* of a hereafter on the Immortalist. I always catch myself seeking for a proof of extinction, and finding none. I used to think once that it was only resentment against the attitude of those who see a proof of cessation of existence in the disappearance of the means by which they have detected it in others. I mean the existence of other Egos than their own. For I never have seen, and never shall see, that the cessation of the evidence of existence is necessarily evidence of the cessation of existence. I'm very wordy, but it's difficult!—Well! In those days I was satisfied that no man ever spoke of his Self—sounds vulgar, doesn't it, Mrs. Joe——?"

"Very. Do go on, Doctor! Spoke of his Self?"

"And meant only his Carcase—I used to think of it this way, and thought others ought to think as I did.—Well! I've changed my mind."

"Oh, Doctor! You never mean to say you have ceased to believe in a soul?"

"Devil a bit, dear Mrs. Joe! I believe in it (in my own, at any rate) more than ever. I only mean that in these latter days I refer my strong conviction on the subject to a physical fact more than to a logical sequence."

"Do you discredit your earlier logic?" asked Professor Absalom.

"Not a bit of it! It was all very well as far as it went, but no man ever was convinced by logic of anything so strongly as I am convinced that I am (to borrow your dear Daddy's expression, Joe) a ghost in a corpse. No—Joe dear—not even that equilateral triangles are also equiangular."

Perhaps the chair on the other side of the table had reminded him. The hair of the corpse was greyer now, and the lines on its face deeper. But the ghost was the same ghost, or very nearly. The small unpuzzled boy that had sat on his knee was almost a new corpse and a new ghost since then. The Doctor continued seeing into my mind.

"Don't look sad over it old Joe! All these are things we should find an immense satisfaction in, if we could only see far enough. It's our confounded short sight."

"You're losing the thread of your discourse, Thorpe," said Professor Absalom. "Why are you so convinced?"

"I am convinced by constant observation that it is *not* true that all people feel more or less as I did; but that there are two distinct classes of people in the world; those that feel that they themselves are *in* a body; and those that feel that they themselves *are* a body, with something working it. *I* feel like the contents of a bottle, and am very curious to know what will happen when the bottle is uncorked. Perhaps I shall be *mousseux*—who knows? Now I *know* that many people feel like a strong moving engine, self-stoking, and often so anxious to keep the fire going that they put too much fuel on, and it has to be raked out and have the bars cleared. Which do you feel like, Mrs. Joe?"

"Do you know, Dr. Thorpe, I doubt if my mind is made up. Of course if I had known there were people who didn't feel as I do, I should have examined myself at intervals to see if I didn't really feel as they did. It would only be fair."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Joseph," said Professor Absalom, "you haven't answered the Doctor's question. Which *do* you feel like?"

"Me? Why, of course, like the contents of a bottle—only with an apprehension that when they draw the cork it will hurt *me*. How do you feel about that, Doctor?"

"Only that it doesn't matter. The cork will come out, and the materials of the bottle go back into the melting-pot. It will come out quite suddenly with me. I shall die of angina pectoris. I have received medical advice on no account to fret myself on that account, as fretting will bring on an attack. And I mustn't allow the apprehension that fretting will bring on an attack to cause me uneasiness. It's like 'je suis Cassandre, déscendue dessus, pour vous faire comprendre, Mesdames et Messieurs, que je suis Cassandre,' etc. I am to keep my thoughts off all depressing subjects, especially Death, which appears to be considered in Europe the most depressing subject there is. No doubt the Higher Altruism would be equally fussy about death on account of the inconvenience to survivors. But when one has done a great deal of surviving oneself one feels one has a right to be selfish about that."

"It seems to me," said Professor Absalom, "that we are wandering from one point to another, perhaps equally interesting to many, but not to me. I suppose it is because I am an Egotist or an Egoist (I forget which is right) that I care so little about Altruism, higher or lower. What I am listening for over here is Thorpe's explanation of what he means by feeling like a ghost in a corpse. I always ascribe a sort of meaning to him; and in this case, being quite unable to detect one, I am obliged to apply to him for enlightenment."

"My dear Absalom, Euclid wanders from one point to another. However, I'll go back to the first proposition with pleasure. By-the-bye, you never told us yourself which *you* feel like, the contents of the bottle, or the bottle itself." The Professor said neither one nor the other. "What *do* you feel like then?" asked the Doctor.

"Very like me. I have always had a startling resemblance to myself, and I have no doubt should have been startled by it when it first occurred to me, only I was so young."

"Couldn't you ask your Self what *it* feels like? Come, Professor, to oblige a young lady? Look at Janey's serious face, waiting to know." The Professor stopped to consider a minute, and then said, "I agree with the poet:

> "Body and Spirit are twins—God only knows which is which—
> The Soul squats down in the Flesh like a tinker drunk in a ditch."

The Doctor observed that he wished Beppino had written that. One of us remarked that it wasn't really Tennyson, but an imitation. He said he would have been glad either way. "Beppino's present imitations," he added, "speak ill for themselves or their prototypes—I suspect the former. That one does honour to both. But the last line is on my side. Come, Professor! And now, Joe, there you sit with your mouth shut! What do you feel like?"

"Yes, Jacky darling, what? Don't pull my wedding ring off."

"I'm not, I was only stroking over it. What do I feel like? I think I still feel more like the engine with the fuel arrangement."

"But why do you say *still*, Joe?"

"Because I feel the feeling grow less. When I was a kid, it never occurred to me that I was anything but a unit, called Joe. As I grew older it was explained to me that I was a machine that converted fuel into Force, that the steam would run down, and that I shouldn't be relighted again till the Day of Judgment, when it might be convenient that I should go to Hell to assuage the Wrath of God. That was Mr. Capstick. The other was Penny Lecturers my Mother took me to. You see it will really be years, even now, before I get quite rid of Capstick and the Penny Lecturers."

"I consider," said Dr. Thorpe, "that most votes go my way. But this present quartet can hardly claim to be real people at all. If you were to poll all the men at all the Clubs, and all the women at all the Churches—what were you going to say, Professor?"

"I was going to ask what the second proposition was to be—supposing we are ghosts in corpses, what do you follow on with?"

"It answers the enquiry—how far do I take Life after Death for granted? which is what we started with. I take it that a great many people—most, perhaps—feel that they are Spirits in the Flesh, though the physical sensation (for that's what it is) varies in intensity. I have it very strongly—conclusively, as I might say. So strongly that when I discuss the immortality question on regulation lines, I feel that I am a hypocrite; and am, out of deference to the correctitudes, concealing what is (as far as I am concerned) the principal datum. I am sure, too, that a large minority at least of the people that I have talked to on the subject have been strangers to the feeling."

"Let's report progress," said Professor Absalom. "Thorpe feels like a Ghost in a Corpse, and concludes that when the Corpse dies the Ghost won't—is that right?"

"No. I don't draw any conclusions. It *may* die for anything I know to the contrary. But I want proof of its extinction, and none is forthcoming. Of course, Professor, if you consider the withdrawal of the impressions on your senses, which have revealed to you the existence of another Ego than yourself, a proof that the revealed Ego has terminated, then the question whether we are immortal is answered as soon as it is asked. I've said a lot of that before."

"I'm not cavilling, Doctor. I'm merely eliciting—give me another pinch. Don't go on again till I've sneezed."

"I intend to sneeze, myself. As soon as I've sneezed—you-may-go-on-eliciting." The sneeze all but caught the last five words, quick as they went to escape it.

"Do you see your way, Thorpe, to any conclusions about the hereafter itself? Anything that throws a light on what and where the Ghost is when its Corpse is insolvent, and in liquidation, with all the Capital withdrawn? Because that's the Crux!"

"That's the Crux, of course. But beyond the physical feeling I have spoken of—little but speculation. The tendency of it has been towards attaching weight to inferences to be drawn from what we know of the Spirit in the Flesh, the Ghost in the Corpse, rather than to those that follow from what are supposed to be communications from the other side. Some of these may be true, or may not. I have always felt on quicksands when I have been tempted (as I have once or twice) to go to Bogy Séances, as Janey calls them. The authentic story of one day is the hoax of the next. But what we can see in the strange phenomenon *other people* is safe to go upon. Consider this case, if you can admit it. A man is born incapable of thought or imagination, of a single generous impulse or noble action. Don't say no such thing can be—after all, it would only be an extreme case. Then suppose him to live a life of perfect satisfaction, supplied with everything his physical nature can enjoy. And then suppose that physical nature suddenly withdrawn, and the miserable Ghost, despoiled of its darling Corpse, left to make the best job it can of existence without any of the things that made up what it thought its happiness on this side. He would be no better off than a baby dead at birth, so far as any growth or development goes that could take place here. But whereas the baby would be open to take new impressions and enter on new growths, our friend would have grimed into him all the worst corruptions of earth, and would have forged a hundred chains to bind him down. I picture to myself some comfortless vacuity, some Cimmerian desert, in which the miserable stunted Ghost would drag on a life of yearning for his glorious debaucheries in his happy days on the planet Tellus. It is a mere fancy, suggested by contrasting such a case with its antipodes, which I take to be that of the man who, absorbed in a world of his own mind, is absolutely independent of externals. The highest regions of mathematical thought, for instance, often cause an almost complete oblivion of physical surroundings. Imagine, to illustrate this, the difference of the meaning of solitary confinement to Isaac Newton and Beau Brummell."

Accurate valuation of the Ghosts of these two was difficult, and was paused for so long that Dr. Thorpe had begun again before any one spoke. He had got wound up, and no one was going to stop him.

"I expressed just now my mistrust of what is called Spiritualism—(very absurdly, as it deprives us of a word the reverse of materialism. I want the word Spiritualist to describe myself, and can't use it because of Mrs. Guppy and the Davenport Brothers). But I'm going to say a good word for even this sort of thing. I owe it a trifle for a message said to come from Voltaire's Ghost. It was asked 'Are you not now convinced of another world?' and rapped out 'There *is* no other world—Death is only an incident in Life.' He was a suggestive Ghost, at any rate. And among other things he suggests that the death of a man might be better described as the birth of a soul, and, inferentially, a parallel between the foresight into its life to come of the unborn child on the one hand and the unborn soul on the other. Who shall say that the unborn child in its degree does not learn as much of this world as we succeed in learning of the next? The physiologist is satisfied that the unborn child knows nothing and can receive no impressions, but then the Physiologist is satisfied also that he himself is what your young friend, Joe—you remember?—called—what was it?"

"A wunner at knowing things?" said I. "That was Porky Owls." And Janey said did any one ever hear such a name?—as before. Dr. Thorpe continued:

"That's it. He thinks he's a wunner at knowing things, and I suspect for my part that he knows just as little of what he doesn't know at all as he did before he was born. In fact, that the soul during gestation has only a *pro-rata* anticipation of what is before it. Of course the comparison suggests all sorts of parallels, some of them uncomfortable ones."

"For instance, Thorpe?"

"Well—for instance—what is the soul-parallel of the child that dies unborn?"

"The death of the Ghost in the Corpse," we all spoke simultaneously.

"Exactly. Do you find the notion comfortable? I don't. But I do derive a good deal of satisfaction from its opposite—the maturity of the Ghost in the Corpse. In fact, dear Mrs. Joe—and I know it's what you were fishing for—it is the keynote of my Philosophy in this matter. The sacramental word is *growth*. If I am right, a long life to him is the best wish we can offer any man. At any rate, he has the opportunity of growing up, though of course he may avail himself of equal opportunities of growing down or sideways—developing as a monstrosity, in fact!"

"But, Doctor," said Janey, "if you are right, what becomes of 'Those the Gods love die young'?"

"Goes the way of all gammon, Mrs. Joe, if I'm right! If I'm wrong, then I go the way of all gammon-mongers. Pending settlement of that question, I busy myself keeping a close eye on the queerest of Phenomena, *Somebody Else;* and what I see tends to confirm rather than unsettle my ideas. Ever since I began to look at this Phenomenon from my new point of view, I fancy I have got more and more able to discriminate and classify him—he almost always presents himself to me now as a growing, decreasing, or stationary Ghost. The last class is the largest, and the first the smallest. Sometimes I am able to account for a nice child turning out a nasty man by supposing that his Ghost is still a baby, and has no control over his Corpse. Sometimes I am confronted with an instance of an attractive old age following a detestable youth. I can only surmise that it is due to a maturing of the contents of the bottle."

"You are not always as mad as you seem, Thorpe," said Professor Absalom; "I discern redeeming features in your present aberration. In fact, I should say that the idea of growth being the greatest good is the natural correlative of my old notion that frustration is the greatest evil."

"Exactly. And I don't stop short, mind you, in my identification of growth and good, in spite of apparent discouragement from the fact that Nightshade grows as well as Peaches. I would settle that all right if it wasn't past midnight. But before the long and short hands are in a line, which ought to be twenty-seven and a half minutes to one, if the clock goes right——"

"Keep to the point, Thorpe!"

"Well—before then I shall have to disclaim any idea of settling the question of the Origin of Evil. That remains exactly what it was to me before, a question not needing discussion until the Balance Sheet of the Universe is audited. As soon as we know the total evil and the total good we may think this question, which seems to us now so important, a metaphysical curiosity. For the logical puzzle remains the same, even if we suppose our Universe to be only one among millions, and the only evil in the whole one isolated stomach-ache. The owner of the stomach will be just as unable to see why an All-wise and All-powerful God created his ache as we are why great fleas should have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em, and little fleas have lesser fleas and so *ad infinitum*. He is the galled jade and winces, even as the human race winces under Leprosy and War and Medicine and Creeds and Stock-jobbing and the Daily Press. But these afflictions may not exist anywhere else in the Universe, or may be qualified down to endurance point."

"I object, Thorpe," struck in Professor Absalom, "to your utilizing a conversation which is not without an element of interest, for the purpose of expressing sarcastic disapprovals of favourite bugbears. Allow me to remark that none of the evils you have so sweepingly grouped together is without able and thoughtful advocates. Perhaps I should except Leprosy, the advantages of which (so far as I know) have never been pointed out. And as for Creeds, Ghosts in Corpses that live in glass-houses shouldn't throw stones. What are you doing now but creed-mongering?"

"I deny it *in toto,* Absalom. I have been illustrating a physical fact, and recording some impressions it has given me for what they are worth. I have, as I have often told you, no creed at all except my belief that my Cause is greater than my Self. Unless indeed you consider a belief that it caused your three Selves, as well as mine, another creed. If so, I have two; but as I regard myself as on all fours with the balance of the Universe in respect of my Causation, I'll allow the two—provided you acknowledge yourselves part of the Universe. Perhaps you don't?"

We looked at each other to see, but decided on accepting the position of effects of the Doctor's Cause.

"I see no objection," said the Professor, "we are all much of a muchness, as results. But I foresee, Thorpe, that you will have to confess to a third creed directly, the Infinity of your Cause."

"It isn't a creed! It's the negation of a creed—a disbelief in his Finity. I don't believe the Power that caused Everything Else is limited, although my *amour propre* is (at present) hardly sufficient to make me ascribe omnipotence to the Cause of Me, on the ground of that achievement only. My modesty permits me to imagine a Power capable of causing Me, but short of achieving Newton or Shakspere. It would be clever and capable, no doubt, but clearly limited."

"It's all no good, Thorpe! You *are* creed-mongering, and may just as well confess it. What I want is to elicit your creed—not to quarrel over terms. What is the end of Life, and what is Death? What is the highest good, and who is the greatest man? Answer me those questions before the two clock-hands are in line, and then it will be an hour past bedtime. Put an end to this metaphysical dissipation, and give me another pinch of snuff."

"The end of Life," said the Doctor, "is beyond its powers of knowledge. Death is a change that occurs at its beginning. The highest good is the growth of the Soul, and the greatest man is he who rejoices most in great fulfilments of the will of God. After that I deserve another pinch myself. Take yours. The clock-hands are too near now for further loquacity."

"I wonder whet the Pater's quooting Tinnyson about," said Beppino's minced accent. He had come in unobserved. "You didn't quoote it quite right though, Pater. It should be 'He is the greatest who rejoices most in great fulfilments of the Will of God.'"

"It's not Tennyson at all," said Janey, with intrepidity. Janey hated Beppino, and he for his part distinguished that she was not his sort. He tugged at his moustache and said, "Oh indeed!" It sounded exactly as if some one else had said "Who indeed!"

This describes his pronunciation very closely. He added that naturally Mrs. Joe Vance knew Tennyson a great deal better than he did.

"I don't know Tennyson more than every one knows Tennyson," said Janey. "That is to say, I've read him almost all once, and some of him a dozen times. But I can't remember a lot of his blank verse. It's not that that I go by. It was that I heard your father make the phrase as he went, and hang on the meaning. Come now, Mr. Beppino, if you know where it is, you can show it us."

"It's getting rather late," said his father. "But there's Tennyson on the shelf." And Beppino got down a volume with confidence. He could put his finger on it at once!

"Is it raining, I wonder?" said Janey. "Because we can walk to a cab if it's holding up." Beppino remarked that it was beautiful moonlight and big white clouds when he came in, but had been raining heavily. He spoke as one who could easily fish in Vivien and converse at the same time. "I know it's here somewhere," said he.

"I shan't forget what you've been saying in a hurry, Doctor," said Janey. "If it's Tennyson I shall try to find some more like it. Perhaps I shall find all about Ghosts and Corpses too."

"Who, gracious," murmured Beppino, still searching. "'Ghosts and Corpses!' How very unkemfortable. It's somewhere here. I know—who yes!—No, it isn't—Whoo, I know! It's here!" But it wasn't. The Doctor thought he would go to bed—and went, after seeing the Professor depart.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to keep you," said Beppino. "But I've just got it." I saw a malicious twinkle in Janey's eye.

"Oh no! We like going to bed late, you can always get up earlier in the morning to make up for it, you know. Like Charles Lamb. Please don't hurry."

"Ha, ha! That's good! Like Charles Lamb!" Beppino's laugh was forced. He wasn't shining. "Here it is—I've got it at last!—oh no——" It was only another mistake.

"Go on, Mr. Beppino," said Janey, "you've very nearly found it so often, some time you're sure to find it outright. By-the-bye, Jacky darling, how *does* one 'very nearly' find a quotation?"

"What a shame, Janey," said I, for I really was getting sorry for Beppino. His vexation was becoming painful to witness.

"Oh well!" said he, throwing the book down, "if you're going to be nasty I won't look for it at all."

"No—no! We won't be nasty; let's all sit down again comfy at the fire, and you bring the books."

"It's hardly worth sitting down about," said he. "Because I know exactly where it is now—what a fool I was not to think of it before." But it wasn't there!

I really never had suspected Janey of so much impishness. She tortured that miserable young man till nearly two in the morning. She would have kept him there all night, I do believe, if I had not said I should go home and leave them to settle it their own way. As for him he was almost crying with mortification.

"Good-night, Mr. Beppino," said Janey; "I hope your admirers will read you more carefully than you have read your Tennyson."

And we walked out into the glorious moonlight and started for home. "I don't mind walking," said she. "Look at those cloud-mountains over there. It's slushy underfoot, but that's no matter."

"I say, Jilly dear," said I. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Just fancy!"

"Well, Jacky darling, the more snubbing that young jackanapes gets the better for him! I never feel that I know much about him. Sometimes I fancy he is really very wicked. But I hope he's only a jackanapes. Do you know he gave me an odd impression to-night, coming in as he did on the top of our conversation, of being only a Baby inside—a Baby's Ghost in a Man's Corpse! I wonder what he was like as a Baby."

"A delightful Baby," said I, "and most comic." And then I remembered how vividly Beppino, in his vexation, had brought back the small boy of long ago, glued to Lossie's skirts. Perhaps he was still a Baby, overtaken by Manhood?

"He was comic enough, just now, when he was in such a rage," pursued Janey. "He won't forgive me easily. But I've never been popular with him. I'm not a Beauty, am I, Jack?"

"No, you're very ugly. But I should like to see your Ghost."

"In the interests of Psychical Research? Well, I'd give anything to see yours!"

"In the interests of Psychical Research, let's asphyxiate ourselves. Only then we couldn't publish our experiences."

"Jacky dear, be serious! I want you to make me a promise."

"All right, Jilly dear. Cut away."

"Promise me, darling, if ever I'm a Bogy, and you're not, that you won't grieve, and be miserable. Because seeing you, and not being able to speak, would be the worst of all."

"All right, love, I'll do my best. Same promise to hold good on your side, of course."

"Of course." And we got home at three in the morning, just escaping a heavy downpour by jumping into a cab on Clapham Common.

CHAPTER XLI

A CHAPTER THAT HAD TO BE WRITTEN.

If you remember anything of the great wrecks of from twent to thirty years ago you will remember the spring of 1874—and th news that reached London three days after the departure fro Southampton of the Glascatherick of the Glass Line. It cam from a Lighthouse Station on the Portuguese Coast, and told ho the great ship with almost all on board had gone down in a gal having foundered on a reef within gunshot of the coast. Whethe from an error in navigation, from misapprehension of the Lighthouse, or from some failure of the engines, no one ever knew The few who survived could tell nothing, their only testimon being that the voyage had all gone well till some twelve hour before the catastrophe, when the glass fell steadily and the win rose to a gale. Some time after midnight, when those who wer sleeping were in their deepest sleep, came a sudden stoppage of th screw, shouted orders and panic of aroused alarm, then again th screw and then the hideous crash as the ship drove stem on t the rock of destruction. Then a scene utterly indescribabl utterly inconceivable, by those who have never known the like Husbands forsaking wives, and fathers children, in the agony o self-preservation, strong men thrusting weaker ones and wome aside in the fight for the boats; Religious Faith stricken wit despair and screaming with terror of Death; and in unexpecte quarters, sudden Heroism. Then forlorn hopes of departing overloaded boats, the cruel task of choice of who should be allowed t go, the dreadful cry of despair as they swamped before the eyes o survivors. And then the terrible word of the strong to the weak who look to them for help to the last, that now no help is left to the powers of man. If, as may be, those that die pass beyond Death from a scene like this, it may be too that the memory of it i happily short, and even that other things we once accounted gai seem worse, a thousand times. For those who survive there is n escape from the knowledge of the past, and the memory of it i present with them till the end.

Of the few survivors of the Glascatherick almost the only one wh could give any coherent particulars was a young engineer wh with his wife was on his way to Italy. He told how she and he were awaked by the sudden stoppage of the screw, followed by the roar of the steam-trumpet, and heard the shouting of orders, and strained rapid action of the rudder chains which passed close to their berths. Then the resumed movement of the machinery, which he was able to recognize as reversed. He anticipated collision with another ship, thinking that to a certainty land was distant. But the instant after came the crash, and he knew it was a rock.

He was so prompt in snatching the life-belts from the cabin ceiling, so prompt in getting them on to himself and his wife, that when they made for the stairway leading on to the promenade deck there were still belated sleepers coming out of their cabins to know if anything was the matter. Otherwise he could only tell that they reached the deck, forcing their way through a half-choked passage, that the officers and the crew were even then unlashing the boats and slacking them down ready for those who might prefer that slender chance of life to the certainty of death. They heard the voice of the Captain above the turmoil,—"Women and children first—men stand back,"—and saw him knock down a man who thrust himself unduly forward. The first mate came to them and tried to persuade the lady to leave her husband and go in the first boat, but she refused. "We go together," said she, and they remained and saw boat after boat get clear, all but two that were swamped almost as soon as they touched the water. They stayed on somewhile, he could not say how long, after the last boat had gone, and then the ship gave a lurch and seemed to go head down—at least, said he, it was the end towards the land.

Then the first mate came again to them and said, "Now is your time to go. The land is not a mile away. Good luck to both!" And then he and she were in the cold dark water. The life-belts floated them and he swam with her left hand in his. The wind had fallen and the sea was less, and he was not without hope. He even spoke to cheer her, and she replied—and then once more. The third time he spoke she did not answer. Still, if he could only reach the land! He himself had been drowned and revived, and that made him hope.

But the great black promontory came no nearer, to all seeming. And the hand he held was lifeless. And his own senses were failing fast—and then his power died in his own hands, and he could hold hers no longer. And it slipped away from him and the darkness closed in upon him, and he knew no more.

Why do I write all this of this young Engineer and his wife? Because I was he, and she was Janey. And I can scarcely bear to write or think of that dreadful time; and could not bear to speak of it, now that I cannot see Lossie, and Dr. Thorpe is gone, to any living creature. Yet it is twenty-three years this November—twenty-three long years!—since I passed a second time through the shadow of Death, and was a second time dragged back to life again—oh, how unwillingly! at a monastery on the coast of Portugal where I was washed ashore, with still a spark of Life.

Why could they not have left me as I was? "Ah, mon fils," said a very old Spanish monk who could speak French, "si on avait su que c'était ta femme, on aurait su te laisser mourir." As I revived slowly my first words had been, strangely enough, "Is the child safe?" The force of the revived sensation had carried me back to the old days in Devon, and I was again asking after Lossie's boy. Then slowly came back the agony of life, and I began to understand that I was alone.

It was a long time before I recovered more than the merest fragments of speech. It was not grief—that was going to come later—but a complete prostration that, perhaps happily, left no room for grief. I could only pass a dumb, stunned, unquestioning existence. I believe it was the old Padre Pablo who set going the first real revival of conscious life. When I replied to him that I should have welcomed death, he said: "Je le comprends bien. Mo aussi, j'ai perdu une épouse. Mais pour moi, mon fils, c'était plus cruel——" He paused a moment; then continued: "Oui vraiment bien plus cruel! Enfin, c'est moi-même qui l'ai tuée." And then in reply to my look of surprise: "Vous ne m'avez pas tout-à-fai compris, mon fils? Je parle de moi-même. Je l'ai tuée." He then went on to tell how, being a young man of twenty, he had had exactly Othello's experience, but never knew till long after how groundless his jealousy had been. He had fled, and it was sup posed she had killed herself. "C'était encore pis pour moi, mon fils, que pour vous," he repeated quietly. "Chaque jour—chaque heure—j'entends le cri de ma mourante. J'ai quatre-vingt-dix neuf ans. Ça me durera jusqu'à la mort."

Nearly eighty years! The blow had been struck in Paris, in th days, say, of the Directory. And the cry of his murdered vic tim, so Father Paul said, and I believed him, had never died away

A day elapsed before I was able to give any intelligible account o myself. I then wrote the words "On shore alone—tell her family," and told them to write to Macallister, Chelsea, England. I fel that would be sufficient—and was glad to be brief, for exertion to think was terrible, and torpor alone seemed welcome. I then charged Father Paul to give in reply to official enquiry when it came, or to newsmongers, simply my name and what I had been able to tell him of the wreck, and then resigned myself to stupefaction. With the exception of a few words with him, and now and then thanks for some expression of sympathy in an unknown tongue, from the others, I was silent, until one early morning as I lay awaiting the dawn and listening to the long-drawn thunder of the swell on the precipice below, my ear was caught by an unwonted sound of voices that came nearer, mixed with the ring of hoofs upon the rock road. Was one of the voices English, or not? No, it was not! Yes—surely it was! And it said loudly and cheerfully, as one who encourages another, "Keep up—keep up—we are here at last."

Then I remember rising from the couch with a new life, and running out to meet Archie Macallister, and then my brain swam and I tottered forward. He was just in time to catch me as I fell, and he picked me up and carried me back like a child. Then I remember lying again on the bed, having found my own weakness, and seeing on one side of me Bony, and on the other her father. I have told enough.

Man has to live, or die. If he chooses the former, he has to discover a *modus vivendi* after any crushing blow. According to my experience, strong natures invest their capital, so to speak, in self-defence, but make up their minds to a long siege. I knew, even as Father Paul knew that the cry of the dying woman would last till death, that I should have to live with the touch of my darling's rings on the fingers of my left hand as hers slipped away for ever. But I had to find out a way of doing it, and I think I was as brave as most.

My partner, and her father, both of whom had left the conduct of business matters in good hands, were able to stay on with me for a while. It may seem strange, but I did not wish to get away from the sea that had engulfed her. It presented itself to me only as the scene of our last farewell. And the last words she said were still in my ears. "Now, Jacky, recollect!" and then when I next spoke, no answer came.

What was it that I was to recollect? It was a promise, repeated more than once after I made it when we walked that time from Poplar Villa after Beppino's literary collapse; repeated in the ship's cabin as I drew the life-belt on, repeated again in the water that drowned her. A promise not to grieve should she go first, lest it should break her heart to see my grief. "Promise again," she had said, and I replied, "I promise, my darling." It was a promise easy to make—but oh, how hard to keep!

Which is the worst off, I wonder—the one that is left, or the one that is gone—the one that sees no longer or the one that still sees, or it may be sees more than ever before? If there be risk of this, how well worth the effort to hang as lightly as may be on the new-found freedom of the departed! Of what profit to oneself is the indulgence of grief at the best? Of how much less if each pang adds a new pang to other pain elsewhere.

It was all such speculation, and the darkness seems so real to him who only guesses in the dark at an unseen sun. But a promise was a promise, and I fought hard and truly to keep mine. There was no fear of my succeeding too well.

It was I then, and neither of my companions, who may be said to have taken the lead towards a resumption of life—the life we had to finish with before each could get on to his extinction or his knowledge of the next. It took me a week of nursing and another of convalescence before I was able to look plans for the future in the face. Had it not been for my companions I might have stayed on indefinitely, wandering about and watching the great white rollers live their life and die. I had no definite expectation of any trace of the body, but I suppose some such thought made part of my motives. I was, however, distinctly relieved when I heard that, though so near the shore, the ship was in such deep water that no attempt at salvage would be made. I had dreaded and avoided details of the wreck as much as possible. It is still rather strange to me why I found it so hard to break away. But there was Bony, and there was her Father. I knew they would not go and leave me. Neither would they, either of them, begin upon the task of settling the future. So I took the matter into my own hands.

"I say, Bony," said I. "Jeannie will want you back."

"Yes, old chap, we'll settle all that presently. What a queer old boy the old Padre is!"

"You had better take care—he understands some English. Do you know, in his novitiate, or something of that sort, he passed a year at a place near London called Foolham. Do you know it?"

"I know there is now an establishment of Catholics at Fulham, but I should hardly have thought it was so old."

"He speaks of another at Amsmeedza. Do you know that one?"

"The one at Hammersmith may be older. But they can't be older than the century. He is."

"Five-and-twenty years older. More. He was actually living in Paris, and married, in the days of the National Convention—before Napoleon—before everything."

"I didn't know Monks married."

"He wasn't a Monk then. He became one after her death. Don't be frightened, Bony, I won't become a Monk."

Poor Bony! I could not break down. He could, and did. When he spoke again I could hear it in his voice.

"Perhaps it wasn't in his novitiate he was at Fulham. It may have been later."

"Very likely! When he told me, I wasn't quite so——"

"I understand."

"As I am now. But, Bony dear, you have got off from the point. Jeannie will want you back."

"Yes—and you too. I know what you are driving at, Partner. You want to run away, and travel about and distract your mind and all that sort of thing."

"Nothing of the sort, Partner." We called each other "partner" by fits and starts, unreasonably. "I mean to do exactly whatever Janey likes."

Bony looked anxious. He felt my hand to see if it was hot. He felt my pulse to see if it was quick. Neither was either. He gave up diagnosis. But he couldn't accept the form of my speech without a protest.

"I see what you mean, dear old chap. Exactly what Janey would like if she were here. Quite right."

But the form of a hypothesis did not suit my mood. "Exactly what Janey likes if she *is* here," said I, obstinately; and Bony replied as one who yields to a patient's whim, "All right, old boy."

He was so gently acquiescent to my every impulse, that I felt I had been dictatorial and overbearing. So I thought I would soften it by discussing hypotheses.

"Do you remember old Dr. Serocold of Magdalen? Oh no—of course, you were at Cambridge. How one forgets!" And Bony asked what about the old party, nevertheless?

"Only what we were saying made me think of the nature of an hypothesis—and of course that made me think of old Serocold. When I told him how long it took to scull to Iffley and back, he twinkled and said he supposed Iffley was the place where they made the hypotheses."

Another time I should have followed this on with more of old

Dr. Serocold's absurd sayings. But now I was aware of a web of strange filaments of pain that kept my eyes dim and my lips still, and I knew I could not laugh. I plunged straight back into the heart of the conversation.

"Grant it's a billion to one against Janey hearing and seeing me now. It's better to catch at that chance and be mistaken than to neglect it and find my mistake after. I know what she would say, almost as if she said it. 'Think of the Lord Chancellor.'" This was the name we had got into the way of calling her Father. "That's what I shall do. Look at him out there."

Poor old Spencer did not look the same man. The prosperous, responsible lawyer that had bid Janey and me Godspeed less than three weeks since had disappeared, and now a broken-down old man wandered some fifty yards from where we sate on the cliff-side, looking out over the sea. He had a pocket telescope with which he scanned the horizon and the rock island some miles out, or the nearer rocks below. Whether he thought to detect a sad addition to the scraps of scattered wreck that were still left, which would have been his and mine to claim, I know not. But he spent much of his time in this way, and did not seem to care for talk. Janey had been his special daughter, and his heart was wrapped up in her. Sarry had practically vanished to Colombo, only reappearing at intervals. His wife was *nil*. I saw that his décadence had begun. As I finished speaking to Bony, he looked over to the grief-worn figure that made, upon a rock-eminence near us, a silhouette against the sea.

"Yes," said he. "The journey was awful. Too much for the old gentleman. I thought I shouldn't ever get him here!"

"Oh, Bony! What a job you must have had!"

"It was pretty stiff. But we got here, somehow. It will be a lot easier to go back."

"But you see what I mean. Janey would like me to keep near him."

"I expect she would be right. All go back together—eh, Joe?" and I assented.

I can well remember how desperately weak I was as Bony helped me up the steep pathway when we returned to the Monastery, not four hundred yards away. And how a thought crossed my mind, as I leaned on his strong arm, that had I not been eight months his senior it would have gone ill with me in the old days at St. Withold's. But it all seemed a dream, and I had hardly strength to think—least of all of the great riddle of time and change. I let the memory slip from mere fatigue.

"You sit down a minute, Joe, while I go back and lend Mr. Spencer a hand," said Bony. But just then Father Paul's voice came from behind us, saying, "Permettez, Messieurs. Je suis assez fort, malgré mon âge," and offered me his arm on my right. Seeing that I had looked round to my left, as expecting him to come on that side, he added explanatorily: "Voici ma main forte—à gauche—*la mano izquierda.* J'ai toujours été gaucher ce que nous nommons ici—nous autres—*zurdo.*" And then my weak mind, stirring again towards its old zest for inquiry, must needs be thinking how long was it before that deadly battle at Helstaple that this other hand I leaned on had struck the life out of the helpless girl. Half a century, and more, though I could not fix the figure. Surely this old man had expiated his crime! But my mind reeled again, and fell baffled from the thought.

And Father Paul himself might be as little in my memory now as any of the crowd of monks who gathered to bid us farewell a fortnight later (I could not move sooner) but that he himself was not among then. He had got his release. And the last I saw of him was what lay on a wooden pallet under a huge crucifix in the cell to which they summoned me to see the Padre, who had died in the night. That was what had held him near upon a century; and now it seemed an effigy in alabaster, small and clear-cut, on which the hand that had struck the blow eighty years since lay moveless. The ears had heard for the last time the cry of the murdered woman, and Father Paul himself knew very much more, or verily nothing.

And I said to myself, but in vain, that my own lot, matched against his, should seem happy. To go with my darling to the very gate of death, to know above all that I had shared every pang to the moment of parting, that what she had suffered I had suffered, that her last words still reached me almost like a voice from the other side—was I not surely the better off of the two? At any rate, if no consolation came from thinking another worse off than I was, the pity for him took me out of myself and gave me a better courage to look back on the past and forward to the days to come.

CHAPTER XLII

JOE IS A WIDOWER. A TENANTLESS OLD HOUSE. HOW HE WENT TO DR. THORPE; AND OF A CHILD THAT WAS SAVED ON THE WRECK. THE SYMPATHY OF BEPPINO. A GOOD IDEA! WHY NOT TAKE BEPPINO TO ITALY?

ONE accepts a widower, as a prosaic incident among one's surroundings, with unquestioning content. Of course Mr. Smith's a widower! It's a way other people have—*you* are not going to be a widower yourself—you know better!

I don't think that brides feel nearly so confident of never being widows as bridegrooms that they will never be widowers. My experience is that women look the facts of life in the face better than men, not only in this but in all things. Man is a sanguine, imaginative animal—perhaps necessarily so. All sorts of things have to be done by men in life that involve the use of intentional hope as a means of self-deception. Man has to obtain shareholders, and negotiate loans, and form syndicates, and do many things of the same sort which a prosaic and unimaginative animal would fight shy of. He goes into the Battle of Life confident of victory, even as the warrior on another field is confident. Perhaps neither would go into battle at all sometimes, if he were not. And then everything would slump.

So if each man had not an inner conviction that other people would lose their wives, but not he—well! would any man dare to marry? Or would he not, if he married, seek for some mate he would be glad to be rid of? Would he not shudder at all Love except the sort that never lasts? Would he not rejoice and be merry when Mrs. Smith was not down to breakfast, and when he came home wet and tired and disheartened to find that Mrs. Smith had not waited dinner for him, but had gone to an interesting lecture, would he not hug himself and be happy and say that now here was a chance of a real comfortable evening? By assiduous cultivation of this attitude of mind he would avoid a possibly overwhelming grief for himself, and by affording a stimulus to a reciprocal feeling on the part of his wife, would fortify her to endure his loss with resignation, and to look forward to it with equanimity.

If I had to live my life over again, with the foreknowledge of what was to come, should I dare to put my head into the lion's mouth, as I did? For I had to acknowledge to myself with shame when it was all over that I was not more—or say, not much more—than half in love with Janey when I first made up my mind that it would be a good thing that we should be a couple and have an establishment. A good thing for both of us, mind you! —for my magnanimity decided on unselfishness (within reasonable limits) as being demanded by self-respect.

And yet I feel I am wrong to think thus bitterly of my old self. How many a young man, after such a shock as I had experienced, would have brought a much more damaged piece of goods into the market than the one I offered Janey! And if none but undamaged goods were for sale in that market, how many weddings would there be in a twelvemonth?

Yet in a sense it served me right—though it was hard measure regarded as retribution for a trivial disloyalty, a slight hesitation, that I should lose at a crash what had grown dearer to me day by day, from the beginning. What did it matter, to put it plainly, that I was still very, very fond of Lossie when I asked Janey to take over the empty tenement *she* could never occupy? It went by veries, said Janey, the little girl that sucked the peppermint drop, and with Janey the woman it went very quickly by veries. Could I count them at all as we stood on the ship and watched the sun go down on that evening of the wreck—the sun that never rose for her again?

But I did put my head in a lion's mouth! I fancied—how many boys of my age have thought the same with far less reason—that things were at an end for me when Lossie, who had filled every corner of my life from the moment she kissed the Man's Boy in the pantry till that earlier shipwreck of mine at Oxford, was suddenly withdrawn and left the dilapidated house to let. And then when the new tenant took possession, and even (if the metaphor holds good) took over some of the old tenant's fixtures, and the new paper came upon the walls, and the whole place was sweet with the smell of flowers, and the song of birds in the Summer, and the fires blazed on the hearth in the Winter—even then I formed no image in my mind of what that house would be like next time it was in the market. The tenant left suddenly, and the house has stood undwelt in. The shutters to the street are closed and the windows broken; but, could you see in, you would still see the old furniture, just as she left it—you would see too that the old tenant's fixtures remain there still. But it is dark and silent; and the gas and water are cut off, and there is no bill up to say it is To Let. Offers have come for it, chiefly from Agents, but the door has never been opened since the day of her departure, except once or twice to show old friends a picture or a piece of furniture. None knows where the tenant is gone, but I suspect the next street;—and then my metaphor is quite at fault, for the house is my heart, and my heart goes out to seek her, and the house could not. This metaphorical house, though, supplies me with something I need. Those old tenant's fixtures still form part of my life, and give me a way of thinking and speaking of my feeling towards Lossie after Janey left me, that I might fail otherwise to find. I had no heart to make new confidences, and I wrote to Lossie as freely of my loss as I had spoken to Janey of my old love for Lossie. I felt all through that they two and I should understand each other, whatever the regulation attitude in such a case made and provided might be. I can remember dimly how I began my letter to Lossie that I wrote from San Joaquim's. It was more like a wish that I could be with her to help her to bear the news I had to tell than a wish that she could be with me to comfort me. With most correspondents I have always re-read every sentence to see that it was right. Generally I never reconsidered anything with Lossie, and wrote straight off. This time I read and re-read, thinking to myself, "Will that give her the idea that I have broken down and cannot bear my unhappiness?" I did not write really to tell her news that I knew would have reached her already, but to do what I could to alleviate the blow that I knew my calamity must be to her. To Dr. Thorpe I wrote otherwise. It was an odd letter, and not one I would have cared that any but the Doctor should see. I cannot recall the words, but I have still his own letter in return, which reached me just before leaving the Monastery. Here it is, twenty-three years old:

"My dear old Joe: Never was a braver letter written than yours. All is right. I am sure of it. I don't believe one of us has any idea how well God is going to manage it. Leave it all in his hands.

"I too had a hard fight for it, and thought I must give in. But I didn't, though I had to tell two baby girls that their mother was, as the phrase is, no more. I know, dear boy, my trial was not to be compared with yours—it was all in the day's work, and only what comes to many. But it was hard to look those children in the face too, that day at their Granny's. Poor little Loss! I remember how she came out and looked up at me.

"I have to cut this down to a short line, to make sure of it catching you—the last possible post, as I make out, is going in half-an-hour. Believe me, all is right, is right, is right. That story of the Padre seems to me as terrible as anything I ever heard—of course I shan't repeat it.

"Yours affectionately,

"RANDALL THORPE."

I had had a long letter from him before, which mine was a reply to. It must have been written after the Padre had told me his story. I feel in a mist about it all now. Little wonder!

I am writing all this, as I have said, for myself alone, and with only a vague idea, to give it working plausibility, that you will one day read it! So I do not copy all the letters I have kept, but place some of them in the MS. uncopied. I do so with the first letter I received from Lossie after my wife's death, and also the second, which came in answer to mine announcing it. Lady Desprez's letters are more illegible than Lossie Thorpe's, and somewhat difficult to read, but worth deciphering by any one who cares at all about following this narrative.

I began this chapter with some kind of notion of helping myself to realize the difference of my surroundings in Chelsea and at Poplar Villa when I came back from Portugal. I had started six weeks before in full health, in the prime of early manhood, in great spirits at an anticipated holiday trip, and by my side the dear woman whom I loved, my companion in all things. What I saw in the little mirror in the hansom in which I rode to Poplar Villa the day after my arrival late at night in Chelsea was a man ten years older, broken down and ill. And when I paid the cabby I saw that he remembered having driven me before, and that then there was another fare.

The little mirror in the cab brought back to my mind that other young man I saw in the glass at Oxford. Was it he, come to life? He had been very much in abeyance during all my happy days in Chelsea. But here he was again, posing as a correct widower; while *I* knew in my innermost heart, though I dared not know it aloud, that all that was *must* be right, however little I could understand it. There was he straining that foolish limited mind of his to grasp something beyond the reach of our conception of Infinity, now and again almost crying out aloud with the pain when some happy memory reached him out of the past, destroying in the lonely silence of the night the sleep I could have slept, but for him. I pointed out to him again and again that Janey might be seeing it all, and the misery his cowardice would occasion her. But it was useless. So I said to him: "Very well, then—you be a widower! But when I am talking to Dr. Thorpe I shall be obliged to you not to intrude your vernacular ideas, and your tedious complaints of the darkness of the night, but to make way for the voice of the watchers who believe in the dawn; and then you and I can talk about it afterwards." He promised to do his best, but when it came to the proof, and the Doctor's voice in the old unchanged library said, "Oh, Joey—my poor boy—my poor boy!" and could speak no more, he broke utterly down, and could only hide his face away in silence, still holding the Doctor's hand, till I fairly forced him to the effort, and one or two words came. I wanted him to say that he would be all right directly, and that it was only just at first. I wanted the Doctor to realize that he was misrepresenting *me*. We got steady in time, and then the Doctor and I were sitting talking in the old place where we and Janey had sat and talked such a short time back.

"No, Doctor. It doesn't hurt me to talk. It's good for me. What was I saying—about the ship? Well! you know there wasn't the slightest reason for apprehension. Oh yes—the glass had fallen, but the rough weather was nothing—nobody troubles about that in a twin-screw of seven thousand tons' displacement. My opinion is they mistook the lighthouse for the one on the island ten miles out, and thought they were steering for the channel, and of course it was the mainland—no one will ever know."

"How many *did* reach the land?"

"Very few. Probably I know less about that than they will tell me at the Company's Office. I shall go over to-morrow. There were two or three little girls saved. I particularly wished to know about one. The reason so little is known about the cause is that the Captain and all the officers went down with the ship. The only men who got away were the boat's crews, and they could tell very little."

"What was the little girl?"

"Rosamond Fox—oh no! Those other people were Fox. She was one of that Daniels lot. It's all just like a dream now. She was a little thing of four, and Janey had been playing with her all day. I had been playing chess—I played six games that day—then it began blowing and we all went to bed."

"But the little girl—why did you——"

"Want to know about her more than the others? Why, because when Janey and I came out with those cork things on us we saw the little thing in the passage. She said, 'take me,' and Janey wanted to, but we couldn't. It would have been useless. Besides it looked as if her father had left her there and meant to come back. That's the worst of a wreck, you can do nothing for any one else. No one can have any conception of what it means who has not seen it."

"Stop a minute," said he; "I can find the newspapers. I've kept them all." And he found one with a list of passengers. "Let's see—what name did you say—Daniels? Dax—Dannicker—Duport. No—there's no Daniels at all."

"Mistake, I suppose. Is there nothing anywhere of people saved?"

"Oh yes! It's here, only I haven't got it yet. Here it is! Oh Joe—how good!"

"No," said I, jumping up from my chair and going to look myself. "You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do. It wasn't Daniels—it was Dannicker. Rosamond Dannicker. Look here!" And as well as I could for tremulous hurry and half-blinded eyes, I read that the little girl saved in the first boat (the only one not lost) was so named, but could not be identified at first, as she only knew herself as Rosie, and no other evidence was then forthcoming. "She was saved by the merest chance," said the paper, "if the narrative of so young a child can be trusted. It seems that her mother, who refused to go herself, preferring to remain and die with her husband, asked the chief mate to place her in the boat. This is our interpretation of the child's report of what he said, as he picked her up, 'Mother says you're to come now—she and father will come together.'"

The recollection of this baby as I forced Janey to leave it had been one of my worst nightmare memories of all.

"Thank God for that, at any rate!" said I. "It has given me one pleasant thing to think of. I shall hear more about it at the Office to-morrow." And I lit a pipe that I might sit and caress this little consolation. The Doctor looked very happy over it. It was something to breathe with, he said.

Then, as I sat there smoking, more came back. I could see as in a dream Janey and myself waiting under the shelter of a bulkhead—could hear her say, "We go together." But surely there was something else she said, and pointed through to the inner stairway, where we had left little Rosie—and surely the officer nodded and left us, going straight for the place. We hardly saw him after, and you may wonder that we did not—but I tell you again, you have no conception of what it was. I could see it all, in one sense, more plainly as I sat there smoking than I did at the time.

“It wasn’t her mother, Doctor,” said I. “It was Janey told the Mate where she was.” And I told him the story, adding that of course he took us for the parents. “He easily might—First Mates don’t learn the passengers by heart.”

“What became of the mother?”

“Heaven knows! I know about the father, though—I saw him try to scramble into the first boat, and the Captain caught him by the collar and flung him across the deck. He’s no loss! He was a red-faced, burly man—one of those chaps there always are on ships, who sit in the smoking-room when they’re not eating, and imbibe goes of whiskey and soda. He’s had his last go now, poor devil!”

“Perhaps he wasn’t a devil. Most likely only a Baby’s Ghost in the Corpse of one of those chaps there are on ships!”

“In the Corpse of a boozy snob!” said I, for I was not mercifully disposed towards him. “But little Rosie was a dear little thing, and was heavy on my heart. She’ll always believe it was her mother, because no one but I can tell her anything.”

We sat and talked, and I began to get a feeling almost of ease. The Doctor’s tranquil acceptance of his own hopeful schemes for hereafter was seductive. For whenever he was not on the lines of giving them logical support he simply accepted them as a matter of course. For instance, when we spoke of Padre Pablo, he remarked that the story was an awful story certainly, but for all that the Padre might be a most fortunate man—or at least a most fortunate soul. “A healthy birth following a long gestation,” said he. “Your little lassie’s worthy father was much more unfortunate. He doesn’t even get any pity. Look how we speak of him! What was the old chap like in himself?”

“How should I describe him? Perhaps as a man concealing pain and forgiving the rack—that’s the nearest I can manage.”

“And his body after death—how did that strike you?”

“A semi-transparent shell with no fish in it. You’ve no idea how small and dry he looked.”

“I can fancy it!—Come in.”

It was a knock at the door, and the knock was Beppino. I was the first of a series of inflictions that it was his fate to impose upon me. For Beppino had never knocked at his father’s door in his life before, and now he did it because I was a widower. For the same reason, when he had come in, on tiptoe, he spoke with bated breath, and asked me how I *really* was many times, each time throwing doubt on my previous veracities. He even went the length of asking shouldn't he pull that blind down? Obviously, truly considerate persons won't allow widowers' eyes to suffer from sun-glare. But when I said, to help him to a rather easier footing, that I should be myself again soon, but of course I had had a stiff time, he couldn't find any words, but merely said "Oh-h," and shook his head sadly, as one who, not being a widower himself, could not talk on an equality. I would willingly have spared him the embarrassment I saw he really felt (it was one we are all familiar with) only I really did not know how to set about it. The Doctor always tried to palliate or shield Beppino, or discover graceful sub-intents in his clumsy egotisms, and I think he was now grateful that he was no worse. At any rate, he had not come hoof-down on my corns, so far. So as soon as he had found an anchorage outside the radius to which my position entitled me, and was fixing me with a sympathetic eye from afar, the Doctor tried again to get him a natural and easy place in the conversation. He had not so very far to seek, seeing how in his boyhood I had nearly lost my own life fishing this very same fat little poetaster out of the water.

"I wonder how long you were quite unconscious this time, Joe. Of course you don't know."

Thus the Doctor, and I replied that I was very much in the dark, besides forgetting all they had told me. It seemed almost miraculous, I said. But then it was different from the other time. This time I was floated by the corks, and the unconsciousness was as much due to exhaustion as to drowning. The other time it was drowning pure and simple.

"Which other time?" asked the Poet. He asked in perfect good faith, and had evidently completely forgotten. His father gave a little half-groan, and said, "Fancy your having forgotten that, Beppino!"

"Who, good gracious—of course," said he, with sudden acknowledgment of recollection; "why, Juvence pulled me out—thet time was left in the water. Just fency my forgetting thet!" And his father repeated drily, "Just fancy!"

I was rather sorry his tone was such as to give Beppino an insight into the figure he was cutting, for no sooner did he perceive that he was doing an injustice to the really noble character of a contributor to several leading reviews, than he proceeded to reinstate it in a way that threatened to disfranchise every other topic. I omit further attempts to spell him, except easy ones.

"Why, good Ged, Joe Vance, you must think me the most beastly ungrateful fillow. Of course I didn't really forget. It was a slip of the mind, don't you know—one of those things that happens, don't you know—what Sammy Sparkler calls a més-alliance with oblivion—don't you know."

"Oh yes—we quite understand—of course, Joey," etc., etc., from both of us. But Beppino was not going to be stroked and patted and subside soothed—not he!

"Why, good Ged! It's only the other night I was talking to some fillows at the club, don't you know, about drowning, and I thought to myself what a lucky fillow I was to be there at all!"

This seemed such a painfully flat anecdote that I felt it would only be kind to make some remark that seemed to assume a reasonable unspoken sequel. So I said: "I was very lucky to be able to haul you out, Joey. But you needn't be so very grateful, because you would have been got out by Carvalho, or Guppy, or —somebody—if I hadn't done it." I was just going to say Thornberry, but stopped myself in time.

Now it is a much easier thing, when gratitude you have not expressed is imputed to you, to swear that you have not said, and can never say, too much, than it is to start fair and say how grateful you are, and always have been for anything. Beppino became quite oppressive as soon as he was supplied with a fulcrum, and my almost happy chat with the Doctor was quite broken up and spoiled. But as it was clear it was to be Beppino *et praeterea nihil,* I tried to calm down his hymn of gratitude for what he had clearly forgotten, and to get the conversation into another channel.

"I say, Bep—(oh, of course, my dear boy, *we* understand. *We* know you wouldn't be ungrateful)—but look here! You were *not* left in the water."

"I *was,* Joe! It must have been half-an-hour at least. I know because of the rum dream I had. It must have lasted half-an-hour, at least."

"The dream about how you were out on the top of the rock, and the lady came. But dreams are like that." And I thought of the Schloss, and how Janey had wondered whether there was a Schloss overhanging this dream. There was, and it had fallen, and she had waked, and I was dreaming still—when should I wake?

"You're tired, Joe," said the Doctor's voice. "Better not try to talk—you stay quiet!" I did so, and went off in a half-drowse, more mere fatigue than sleep. Beppino showed consideration ostentatiously, going out of the room like a conspirator oppressed by sympathy.

"Feel better, Joe?" asked the Doctor a little later. I had roused up and gone to the open window. It looked out over the greenhouse top. It was a fine early summer day; but very chilly after Portugal. I listened in vain for the song of Lossie's birds in the greenhouse. The scythe of Samuel the gardener rang as swath followed swath. Nothing would induce Samuel to use a lawn-cutting machine. He was old, he said, and his scythe was going to last him out. So his whetstone still was to be heard thinning the old scythe down, and (as I have understood) waked Beppino too soon, and was a ground of complaint. To-day I thought how like Time Samuel looked, mowing the lawn near the old pear tree, whose blossoming had come and gone while I was watching the great white rollers following each other to death on the Atlantic. I studied Samuel mowing, and said I felt rested. The Doctor was finishing a letter at the table.

"I tell you what, Joe," said he, pausing before sticking to the envelope, "that dream of the Poet's had curious points. He turned out on the top of the rock (you recollect) just like a very small baby, and the lady picked him up and kissed him. He couldn't understand having a pair of babies' legs on." And the Doctor stuck down his envelope and directed it. Then he continued, "I wish that baby could grow. If he were to get away for a while and get shaken out of himself a little it might give him a start. At present he consists of ill-developed artistic faculties and no moral nature to speak of. I do *not* think, whatever any one may say to the contrary, that living in a circle of narrow-minded voluptuaries can be good for any young man—well! he's five-and-twenty, that's not old."

"It wasn't his age I was thinking of. But are these friends of his such a lot of sweeps?"

"Oh dear, no! I don't suppose any of them are half as grubby as they pretend they are. But they are voluptuaries for all that. They enjoy the confidence of the Muses and can instruct others in the ritual of their worship without initiation for themselves. They take real pleasure in the practices of painting, music, and versification, so far as they can be indulged in spontaneously. Some of them, if they were forced to take pains, would do good work in their own way. But they are voluptuaries, and prefer to enjoy the luxury of smatterings to any outlay of effort to attain maturity. What strikes me as oddest about them is the way in which they ignore the fact that their chief idols, the men whose names are always in their mouths, have attained their own greatness by strenuous and unstinted industry." The Doctor pulled up and took snuff. "I sound," said he, "like Mr. Barlow delivering a Popular Lecture on Impostors."

"Couldn't you make Joey go and see the world—get him out into the fresh air?" My suggestion had an element in it of a desire that Beppino should go somewhere else. I was a little morose at his having come in at all. The fact is, he was always in the way at Poplar Villa.

"He's always talking about going to Italy, but he keeps putting it off because it is so important that he should not vitiate his present inspirations until their mission has been fulfilled. I don't exactly know what they are, but he wishes to keep the Aspects of Nature homogeneous until he has finished the Enigmas of Aphrodite—I believe that's to be the title of his great work. The unity of the poem would be impaired if an Italian influence crept into the last half. He entertains no doubt of its power over a susceptible soul like his. Besides, he has never been at sea, and is terrified at the idea of crossing the Channel."

"Poor little beggar! I can understand his last reason. Sea-sickness is an enigma of Aphrodite no one has ever interpreted."

"Another thing is that although he is a very good French and Italian scholar, as far as writing both languages goes, he simply has not a word to throw at a native of either country. He can't understand what they say, and complains of their pronunciation I don't believe he'll ever go unless some one collars him and takes him."

This set me a-thinking, and I resolved in my own mind that however little sympathy there was between us, I would collar Beppino and take him away for the Doctor's sake. I saw it would be a real relief to him. I was even now beginning to fidget about the business which was partly the original object of my journey to Italy that had ended so disastrously. No one but I could transact it, as it related to a partnership or alliance between my own Firm and one in Milan. It was not open to indefinite postponement—in fact, the sooner it was carried through the better I told the Doctor of this idea before I left him. He thought, I really believe, that I was making a great sacrifice. I was not For nothing made the slightest difference to me, one way or the other.

When I announced to Mr. and Mrs. Macallister my intention of going to Milan later in the year, and taking the Poet with me, Jeannie said, "What, that little idiot! We shall be able to go and see the Doctor while he's away, Bobby," which was the current name for her husband. Bony muttered something I didn't quite catch, but I understood it to imply a low estimate of Parnassus. I told Jeannie that perhaps if they paid Poplar Villa a visit now, she would have a chance of sitting for Aphrodite. "You might get a turn, for Hephæstus, Bony," I added. And Jeannie said, listen to her jealous husband growling over there. It was "like the beasts at the Zoological Gardens."

I spent an evening in every week with my poor old father-in-law. He was slowly recovering some of his lost ground, but I saw he would never be himself again. I had, however, a sense of discomfort, not due to this, during my visits. His absolute certainty that nothing ever could be known on the hereafter question was painful to me, and I never could get him to see that his position claimed powers of judgment just as extended as that of those who held the opposite view. I talked to Dr. Thorpe about him, and he said it was only Spencer's legal caution. "I dare say," said he, "Spencer feels bottled just as much as I do, but he's afraid to commit himself and be twitted for rashness hereafter if he turns out non-existent."

Lossie was to come over to England this Autumn, bringing children for European education. It was only her second return since her marriage. It was small allowance in over eight years. But this time Sir Hugh was coming with her for a long spell—perhaps not to return at all. The first time (which you may remember was during my real engagement—the second one—with Janey) he was a very short time in his native land. This time they were to stop in Italy during the Winter, to soften the severity of the change, and come on to England in the Spring. It was something, at any rate, to look forward to—in fact, "Lossie again" was almost the only anticipation I dwelt on with pleasure. I had, however, misgivings that I might build too much on it—and that it might turn out a disappointment. Things did, very often! I must be prepared for change. But then it would not matter if it were only in the same direction as the change I had seen before.

I don't think I can have been influenced by the chance of seeing Lossie a bit earlier, in my decision to go to Milan in the Autumn, because I made that decision when Dr. Thorpe talked about getting Beppino abroad. The first announcement of their scheme for pausing in Italy was in Lossie's letter replying to mine about the wreck.

As to the date of my going, that of course depended on the rapidity of Beppino's inspiration. It was certainly impossible to complete the last enigma of Aphrodite within two months; and then, we should have to wait for the end of the great heat. It was just as well not to be hurried, and we should be sure of a calm Channel, crossing towards the end of August. If it had been the Northwest Passage the Poet could not have made more fuss about it. Certainly it was very curious how a man (I had to remind myself that he was one) whose experiences had gone so far in some directions should be so childish in others.

CHAPTER XLIII

HOW JANEY'S PIANO WAS TO BE KEPT IN TUNE. FRAU SCHMIDT. THE WALDSTEIN SONATA. THE FRAU MISLEADS BEPPINO. WHO MISS SIBYL FULLER PERCEVAL WAS. THE GOLDEN BEAD IN THE HUMAN CRUCIBLE. THE KINCARDINESHIRE JOINT-STOCK BANK. HOW ABOUT THE DOCTOR'S HEART?

THE conscientious thoroughness with which Janey had put her affairs in order before starting was a great relief to me in the rearrangement I had to make after my return. Even that excruciating experience, the disposal of the wardrobe, was in a great measure spared to me. She had given away almost all the clothes left out after packing for the journey—and what were left were chiefly new things I did not associate with her. My stepmother saw to their disposal, and I made no enquiry. I persuaded Pheener, as I continued involuntarily to call her, to occupy the house provisionally, as I did not look favourably on the idea of letting it, and it was much too big for me. At the same time, although I liked to think of it as still tenanted, and maintaining somewhat of continuity in my connection with Chelsea, I could not bring myself to live there, and divided my life about equally between the Macallisters and Dr. Thorpe, and (when I could get away easily from the works) Janey's old home at Hampstead.

I clung to the idea of keeping the house *in statu quo,* or rather, perhaps I should say, shrank from the task of dispersing its contents or moving them elsewhere; hence any little thing that spoke of its still being in use was congenial to me. I can recall especially, on one roasting afternoon in July, as I passed my own house on my way to the Macallisters, what pleasure it gave me o hear the piano-tuner tuning Janey's piano by contract. If here had been the slightest neglect of that contract I should have written instantly to Broadwood that I regretted to find, tc. So my pleasure was not solicitude about the piano. It was he coming on it accidentally; and the air of life it gave to the house that made it so agreeable to me. I let myself in with my latch-key, and talked sympathetically with the operator, treating the welfare of this piano (which no one ever played on) as the first object of human effort, whatever the next one might be. We recited a kind of chorus of indignant hostility to damp. We lamented that this particular piano should be so seldom played on; not because of the interest of listeners or performers, but because it lost pitch. Our conversation seemed to assume that the final end of music was the perfect condition of musical instruments. It sanctioned Mozart and Handel and Bach, as supplying them with a *raison d'être;* but implied that the equilibrium of perfection was to be found rather in their perfect readiness for use than in any results that would accrue from it. Even the book-collector is not more callous to the contents of a book than a truly professional piano-tuner to a Sonata.

So when I dwelt with regret on the silence of the instrument, whose sweet little hammers remained for ever in rank, while each might be longing to share chords and assist in the resolution of discords, and show superhuman alacrity in response to magnificent execution—my friend was only inclined to sympathize under reservation. Still, concession was permissible to human weakness; and he went so far as to remark that it was a good pianoforte, and no doubt there were people who would like to play upon it. He had been tuning an old piano in Beaufort Street that afternoon. It was quite past use, and its owner was a lady who couldn't go to expense. I don't know that he meant this for a hint; but I took it as one, and asked him to give a message to the lady, placing my piano at her disposal, subject to conditions about time. She called next morning, and Pheener made stipulations accordingly.

I did not want to make this lady's acquaintance, or anybody's. But I found a certain selfish satisfaction in thinking that there was a small fraction less of discontentment in the sum of human misery—owing to Janey's piano. I remember how once when Janey had a bit of sticking plaster on a cut finger, she said: "My poor piano! How it must be swearing at that broken wine glass!" The evidence of her existence to the senses of the piano had been withdrawn again; and from myself also this time. An equivalent was now supplied to the piano. There was none for me.

My own love of music had never been more than negative. I liked hearing Janey play when I was smoking, but only went to concerts on her account; or because a friend among the performers had sent tickets. Yet I suppose I was really just as musical as the public, though much less numerous. The public can show its well-balanced mind—one-half going to an entertainment, the other stopping away. I was too self-contained to do that, but had I been divisible I fancy one of the halves would have gone to every Monday Pop. For in those days there were Monday Pops.

Being, then, this sort of ambiguous half-lover of music, I was arrested opposite my own house on another later, even hotter, July morning by the sounds that came from Janey's piano. Certain canaries were in competition or anxious to accompany; and a parrot was eloquent close by, but was not speaking to the point. Street-cries made other interruptions in connection with peas and new potatoes. But the music had the best of it.

When a tooth that has ached for days is suddenly touched with some effective anodyne, the incredible rest is good at the moment, even though the torment be sure to come back. When a heart has ached for months, and for sheer weariness is ready to welcome any alleviation, however small, a strain of music we might scarcely notice at another time may be a relief. This music somehow relaxed the tension of that web of pain that I spoke of before, just after the wreck. It had remained ever since—now more, now less—but always there!

As I stood watching the red sail of a barge dropped to negotiate the centre span of the old wooden bridge, and saw the barge jam itself across two piers, and make up its mind to wait for the next tide, it dawned slowly in my semi-musical brain that the little hammers must be very glad of this new activity. How they must be rejoicing over impulses they had never felt the like of! In a few moments I was almost wondering if it was really a human hand that could do it? Had it a thousand fingers, and a heart in every finger?—Did each little hammer say at each note, "I have recorded in a second a world of loves, aspirations, and longings; a hundred tales of skies and seas, of piled-up clouds and driving foam; of the cry of the Earth for the Dawn, and the lament of Hesperus in the flame of the sunset; and I am ready to do so again the moment Frau Schmidt says 'go!'"—For Schmidt was the name of the lady who had borrowed Janey's piano, and that was what her magic hand was doing with those little hammers. Each single note said all that could be said—all that the most exacting could ask—of love and life and the great interminable universe. Each one, as its chance came round to speak, said it again and again, and each as it spoke said too that the end of it all was Death. There is no life but dies, no love but ceases, no sun but shall some day grow cold and be left an ash in dark space. I stood and watched the dropping red sail of the boat, and my heart pleaded with the music for a respite. But the music only said again, if possible more beautifully, all it had said before, and gave no hope.

Stop! What was that? A sudden voice of triumph crying out through the bewildering vortex of resonances—a sound as though the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy. And then again—and then again! I stood and listened, and lived in the music. Why would it persist in Death after such a cry as that? I stood and listened and longed for it to come again. . . . There!”

And I heard what it said so plainly that its repetition made a sentence in my ears. “Stop—stop—stop! You’re quite mistaken. Stop—stop—stop! I know you’re wrong.” And when a day or two later (for I was due at the works that time) I sought Frau Schmidt’s acquaintance, I was able to make her understand, by repeating that sentence, that it was the Waldstein Sonata I was asking for.

I could tell how tall and broad Frau Schmidt was, by resorting to a yard measure, but I don’t think my resources in language are equal to describing how ugly, nor how rude. But what did that matter? The moment she had dusted the piano-keys and cracked her fingers, one knew what was coming; and in a minute it came and the whole world was enchantment. She spoke English very fluently and without more German accent than was natural; but contrived to select phrases no Englishwoman would use. “I shall play to you a great deal very often,” said she. “And you shall find my choosings of musique to your satisfaction.” I did, and I considered that I was indebted to Frau Schmidt for an introduction to Beethoven, and have ever since regarded the latter as being not so much a Composer as a Revelation. His music always seems to me to express everything that I can understand, and to supply exhaustive conclusions in all the crucial questions of life and death; and I am satisfied that, when I don’t understand, it is my fault, not his.

Very likely the foregoing may seem strained and exaggerated —but wait till you have undergone such tension as mine had been, and you may judge otherwise. For my part, I merely write a recollection.

Anyhow, music was a great consolation to me at this time and I felt no sort of new trouble because I heard it in a desolated home. So long as I could shirk getting up in the morning and coming down to a breakfast table there with no Janey, I did not so much mind the rest of the day. My courage always went bankrupt during the night, but I made up the books and was ready to face my creditors by tea-time. Then very frequent appointments ensued for Frau Schmidt; and Jeannie and Bony, and even more, came in. And then the Frau, after grunting at every one, and insulting selected objects of contumely, would crack her hands backwards and suddenly let Heaven loose. How often I said to myself after some perfectly convincing phrase of Beethoven, "Of course if *that* is so there can be no occasion to worry." It could not be translated, naturally, into vulgar Grammar and Syntax; but it left no doubt on the point, for all that.

I am very glad that I was cautious and did not give Beppino a general invitation to Frau Schmidt's recitals. For when he came, his conduct left much to desire the absence of. He recognized Mozart, Bach, and Handel as friends of his boyhood whom he had outgrown; but who deserved recognition. He closed his eyes and pawed his fat hand to the tune as one who sanctions and forgives familiar simplicities in a rudimentary art. He derived as keen a satisfaction from this assertion of his maturity as ever the Art-Critic did who invented *primitives.* Why he found it a gratification to his vanity and a means of affirming freemasonry (or trying to) with the Schmidt over our heads and to our exclusion, I can't imagine. But he did, and then made a merit of concession to Beethoven and Schubert. He elbowed us all into the background, and shared the whole proscenium with the German lady, who I think at first accepted Master Beppino as a reality. But a Nemesis was awaiting him; for in his anxiety to arrive at the pinnacle of Wagner, he forgot that he was not acquainted with all the works of that composer, and laid himself open to detection. When the Frau (in whose face I saw suspicion) asked him if he knew the *Grossgänserichslied* my German scholarship was enough to make me smell a rat. Beppino was taken in and asked for a little, to see if he knew it. The Frau complied, though she said that without a full orchestra it could not be understood. It appeared to consist of a maelström of surgings and rumblings, quite in the lower half of the keyboard, and getting distinctly worse. The performer seemed to recognize this fact, and suddenly administered the top-note of the instrument, quite by itself, like a pill, and it didn't seem to act. On the contrary, the symptoms became alarming, and had to be treated with a second dose, this time two very high notes, with no better result. Just as the time seemed to be coming round for a third, the Frau stopped and said she couldn't recollect any more.

If Beppino would only have left it alone, none of us would ever have guessed. But he persisted in breaking into our subsequent enjoyment of Chopin op. 490 by introducing discussion of the *Grossgänserichslied* between the movements. His admiration of it was rapturous. He even petitioned the Frau to repeat a few bars, in contrast with some phrases in op. 490. But his amazement and disgust went almost to a burst of tears when the lady said impatiently: "I cannot repeat that stuff. It is not Wagner; I make it all myself. You are the 'great Gander,' Mr. Thorpe." She would not let him off, but I don't think it was quite fair to Beppino.

He was very tempersome about it, and forgot that it wasn't my fault. Even if it had been, I consider that the Poet's chain of inference was not warranted. It is not necessarily true that a person who misleads you about Wagner doesn't want you to go to Italy with him. Beppino nearly pulled his moustache out by the roots over it. "Of course you think me a dim fool, Juvence," said he. "But I don't want to be a baw to anybody. And I'm not sure that it's good for me to go to Italy just yet. I have to consider My Work."

"My dear Bep," I remonstrated, "don't be a little jackass. I was talking to Madame Schmidt about it, and she says no human creature could possibly have known that what she played wasn't a version of Wagner. No one could say anything at all with certainty about an imitation of a full orchestra on a piano." I slurred over the fact that Beppino's blunder had not been in *not* knowing that it *wasn't* Wagner, but in greeting it with acclamations due to undoubted authenticity. I assured him that the lady had stated, with evident self-satisfaction, that it was a "gleffer" imitation, and she had "dried it on Makaroffsky," and he had been "dagen in." I knew I had got this name all wrong, but that it wouldn't matter, as Beppino would never question anything plausible. He was much appeased; discerning a recovery of self-respect for himself in his great fellow-victim, whom he accepted *à bouche ouverte*. But I think what assuaged him too was my exaggeration of the Frau's very slight German accent She was, after all, only a Foreigner; why should Balham fret, or Upper Tooting?

"Well," said Dr. Thorpe, when I rejoined him in the library after this conversation with Beppino in the old nursery, "has the Poet come to his senses—or their substitutes?"

"He's come out of his non-senses," said I, "and I daresay won't go back. I've told Anne to pack his things for him, and I'll come down on Monday night to take him away in the morning. I hope to goodness the wind won't blow!"

I made all arrangements for Frau Schmidt to continue to enjoy her privilege of the last six weeks, *sine die;* said good-bye to Jeannie and Bony and the babies; paid Hampstead a farewell visit; and went over to Poplar Villa on the Monday to get a really comfortable chat with Dr. Thorpe before starting next day. After dinner we settled down to coffee, smoke, and recapitulation in the Library, as of old. "I'm glad the Poet has gone to this farewell dinner at the Fuller Percevals," said he. "We can be snug and enjoy ourselves. I am really sorry for that boy. I keep watching for any sign of coming maturity in him, and only meet disappointment. It may come some day. Perhaps Sibyl Fuller Perceval will make him grow."

"Oh, that's what it is, then!" said I to myself. And then aloud. "Sibyl Fuller Perceval. A pretty name, anyhow! And they live in Park Lane, I understand?"

"They live extremely well in Park Lane. And equally well at Acres, which is their Somersetshire residence. And I believe they undergo very few privations at Craigsellar, which is their deer-forest in Perthshire; though it is a mere shooting-box—according to Beppino's report. Even when they have to rough it in Paris or Vienna they manage to come pretty well off for champagne and delicacies. But they detest the World and its vulgarities; and are distinguished from the remainder of the Court-Guide by their Arcadian simplicity and devotion to Nature and Art, especially Art. All their tastes are artistic."

"Including champagne and delicacies?"

"Certainly. Beppino assures me that the old gentleman is superior to Bacchus, and that his love of dry Monopole is a Spiritual instinct. The daughter's love of dress is not due to a wish for admiration, or any personal feeling at all. It is an innate love of beauty, and its development is among the higher duties of life. Miss Sibyl doesn't neglect them, and runs into hundreds over dresses from purely Artistic motives."

"Is she a beauty herself?"

"She is—but it is a beauty of a higher type than the common sort. You and I are too banal (that's the word) to understand it. It takes a Poet with a big P, or an Artist with a big A, to do that."

"Are there any brothers? Is she the only daughter?"

"She's the only child."

"Ho!"

"Why did you say 'Ho'?"

"Oh, for no particular reason."

"People don't say 'Ho' for no particular reason, Joe. However, I'll tell you why you said 'Ho.' It was because you thought perhaps this girl loved Beppino, and that more would come of it. But I don't believe it will. If I did, I should go straight to old Gaffer Perceval and give him a hint about the young man's character. I *would*, Joe, though he's my own Son! I assure you I'm in earnest. But, good Lord! It's as safe as the Bank. Why! —the girl will have fifty thousand a year! That sort don't marry Parnassus—eh, Joe?"

"Doesn't it? It can afford Parnassus." But the Doctor, after looking uneasy for a few seconds, said: "Oh no—oh no—stuff and nonsense! Thing's impossible." He then had a good pinch and a long sneeze, before he resumed the Subject.

"You know, Joe, I shouldn't have *liked* the job of sketching Master Joey to his future father-in-law!"

"Has there been anything since that Thornberry business?"

"I couldn't say. I am a coward, and would rather not know. I find it difficult to excuse myself, but then, look you! He's the last one here, and he's Lossie's boy! Why, remember the ridiculous small Baby that fetched you in at that door and got under the table. And then we did the Euclid. He's little Joey still, and I can see it as plain as possible. His Corpse has overrun him, and the poor Baby Ghost has never a chance. His intellectual powers and his carcase have grown. But his Self—no! It's little Joey still—that preposterous kiddy-widdy."

And I saw the Doctor's face beam in the flicker of the firelight (we liked the half dark to chat in), as he thought lovingly of the baby of the years gone by. What would Lossie feel about that baby when she came to see him, this time? At any rate, she knew nothing about his follies—and never would from me. Then I went off thinking about Lossie, and her farewell to me on her wedding-day. When she came back four years ago, I had not wanted her as sorely as I wanted her now. She had presented herself to me as a new person, but with the force of sisterhood. If I dreamed about her then, Janey came into the dream and cancelled all else. So I thought back into the older years, where memory lived in no terror of the awful night of the wreck. I wondered if I should really meet her in Italy. I was temporarily at truce with pain until she should come as a reinforcement. Then I would have it out, and be victorious. Or rather I was like one who retains his breath in a long dive, and every second expects the air. Lossie would come, and I should then get at a *modus vivendi,* for the rest of the time. If I had known how long the time was to be, and how lonely, should I have dared to face it?

"All's to come right in the end, Joe, be sure of that!" And the Doctor's voice struck into my reverie like the phrase in the Waldstein Sonata. "I don't mean, you know," he went on, "that we shall meet corrected and improved editions of each other hereafter, in a corrected and improved place, from which all the beasts and fools, who have not been corrected and improved out of all knowledge, are excluded by a Creator who might have had consideration enough for them to let them be—doing no more harm than any other beast or fool who has never come into existence! I believe I describe very fairly many people's idea of a selected hereafter. But *I* don't mean any such thing. I mean when I say all's to come right in the end, that it will do so in some sense absolutely inconceivable by us—so inconceivable that the simple words I use to express it may then have ceased to mean anything, or anything worth recording, to our expanded senses. To a mind that conceives this degree of Inconceivability, it seems merely common sense and common prudence to leave it all in God's hands."

"But," said I, "there must be some residuum of the rubbish of our thoughts and perceptions that will hold good throughout for this state and the next. There must be a golden bead at the bottom of the Crucible."

"Of course there is," said the Doctor. "Love is the golden bead at the bottom of the Crucible. But love isn't thought or perception or even passion, in the ordinary sense. It's God knows what! I give it up. But it's a breath of fresh air from the highest Heaven brought somehow into the stuffy cellar of our existence. It's the flash of light that strikes on the wall of the tunnel our train is passing through, and shows us the burst of sunshine that is coming."

And again as he spoke, I heard the phrase of the Waldstein Sonata. And I thought to myself, how simple it all was, as stated by Beethoven; how complex when rendered by what my father would have called poll-parroting. Though truly Dr. Thorpe's poll-parroting seemed to me to go very straight to the point.

"As for Joey," continued he, going back to our penultimate, and to his hesitating tone again, "he's had much too easy a time of it. When I say I hope Miss Fuller Perceval will make him grow, what I mean is I hope a disappointment's brewing for him in that quarter. Only I doubt his being capable of forming an attachment the frustration of which would do more than wound his vanity. That might make him worse instead of better. His best chance would be in real trouble. You see, Joe, one of my theories, about soul-growth, is that pain of one sort produces it. Perhaps I should rather say that certain circumstances produce forced growth of the soul, and we call the effect on ourselves pain. We can't the least analyze the sensations which a great loss——" The Doctor stopped suddenly in the middle of his sentence. "There--there!" said he, "I was quite forgetting. But you forgive me, my dear boy; I know." He interposed a pinch of snuff, and shied from off his topic. "What is the German lady who plays the piano? Did you ever find out more about her?"

"I've not asked questions—I had just heard about her before the piano-tuner mentioned her—or I might have been afraid to ask her round. But go on, Doctor, where you left off—'We can't analyze the sensations a great loss produces'—Dr. Thorpe looked intuitively at me for a couple of seconds—then decided to go straight on.

——"Produces, because we can't localize it. It is not our body that is suffering, nor our mind, which often remains quite collect and intact. It is, briefly, our Self. And it is in moments of greatest suffering, of that sort, that we feel most keenly that we *have* a Self, that is neither mind nor body." He stopped, and then after a pause said, "This is vivisection," and I answered, "I prefer it." I am not cooking the conversation, but giving it word for word. The operator, however, seemed less ready than the subject. *I* did not want him to flinch from his analysis. So I went on with it myself.

"When I began to recover consciousness—well! let me think—what *did* I feel? I myself was perfectly free from suffering and recollection alike. I only wanted to be left unconscious. What I wanted to say to them was, "For God's sake, *don't!*" Then I spoke, and thought it was Lynmouth over again. But I can't recollect that. I was told after. Then I had a long half-stupefaction, in which I waited for the man I should be obliged to be to remember something I dreaded. That's the nearest I can go to it."

Then I began to suspect that Dr. Thorpe imagined he had touched too roughly on the subject, and believed I was making a parade of my readiness to talk of it in order that he might not blame himself. Perhaps neither of us was sorry that the post made an interruption. The Doctor opened a variety of letters and enclosures, and I filled a fresh pipe and went on smoking in silence, till the letters should be done with.

"Violet and her husband are due next week in Bruton Street. You'll just miss them, Joe. Like to see her letter?—Now what's this one? Will I subscribe to the Home for Indigent Well-Connected Valetudinarians and Hysterical Discharged Female Convicts? No—I won't——"

"You made that up, Doctor."

"Well, my dear boy, it's very near. Now what's this? Another letter from the Dumfries and Kincardineshire Joint-Stock Bank. Do you know, Joe, I've been pelted with letters and statements about that Bank—it's gone smash and ruined all the shareholders. I'm sorry for them, but why did they send to *me?* I can't imagine. *I* can't help them!"

"Let's have a look," said I. And the Doctor threw me over the papers. I caught them, and he opened another letter.

"Well—that's a good joke!" said he, presently. "You remember Thistlethwayte?" I couldn't, however.

"He was that Perfect Lubricator chap. Well! He's got hold of a rich man who wants to found a Chair of Perpetual Motion in some University, here or in America, and he's to be the first Professor. Isn't that funny?"

"A—yes. But I was looking at these Bank Failure things. Are you quite sure you never had any shares?"

"Quite sure. I never knew anything of it." He was evidently quite unconscious of any connecting link.

"What about the perpetual motion man?" said I. "Is he going to found the University as well as the Chair?"

"He'll have to. But then he can work in some other chairs of the same sort, a Professorship of Quadrature of the Circle? How would that do? Or a chair of Omniscience? One of Aërostation would be too reasonable. And one of Transmutation of Metals——"

But the Doctor stopped suddenly, and lay back in his chair drawing in long breaths and blowing them out sharply. "It's nothing," said he; "it 'll be over directly." Some whiskey was waiting to be made into toddy on the table, and I made him drink a little. It made him recover his colour, which had gone rather rapidly out of his face and hands. In about a quarte of an hour he seemed all right again.

"I often have little upsets of that sort," he said. But it mad me determine to say nothing more of the Bank Failure, which could not help feeling uneasy about. I slipped the papers unnoticed into my pocket and kept the conversation to cheerful subjects, such as Lossie's arrival, the possibility that she might remai in England for good, and so forth. We chatted on very cheerfully till we were interrupted by the Poet, almost wild with pani because the wind was blowing a gale—so he said! I went out to see, and came back saying that it wasn't a gale—it wa a hurricane and was just from the worst quarter. "Never mind, Bep," said I, "you know you've only got to swallow a quart of salt water, and then you're sick and never feel any unpleasantness after." A further statement that people *had* been known to bring their toes up, inside out, excited his suspicion. "I believe you're humbugging, Juvence," he said—"I really do—Now I say, *reely,* aren't you?" And I admitted that it was the case, and observed that it was a balmy summer night. "There now," said he, "you're going all the other way round now. One doesn't know where to have you sort of cheps." And he went to the window and put his hands out to see if it was blowing great guns.

I persuaded him to go to bed, as a good long sleep (I said) kept off seasickness. And as soon as the Doctor retired, I made a packet of the Bank Papers with a letter to my father-in-law, asking him to find out if anything concerned Dr. Thorpe. I wasn't easy about them, but could not see anything in them myself. I posted them next day at Charing Cross, when we were in course of departure.

Thus it came about that Beppino and I were actually crossing from Dover to Calais.

CHAPTER XLIV

BEPPINO AS A MARINER. PARIS AT PARIS. THE JOURNEY TO ITALY. IDOMENEO PELLEGRINI. BUT NO JANEY NOW. BEPPINO CARRIES OFF JOE'S TRUNK TO FLORENCE; WHEREOF THE ENGRAVED NAME CAUSES MUCH APPREHENSION.

LEST I should seem to write with undue irritation about my namesake, I may remind you that I now look back at him through events I have not yet related—events not of a sort to appeal to leniency. You know nothing of them.

I felt very tolerant at the time of our start. Only the childish part of him came to the fore. There were no interesting girls in the train, whom he could have snapshotted (as the phrase is nowadays) as models for any repulsive female in History or Mythology. So his manly qualities kept in the background. He was so anxious to know about the cross-channel passage that he inquired of railway porters at stations on the way down whether the sea was rough. He tried to do it in an incidental careless way, as an old sea-salt who was above suspicion of basins. The referees replied, unfeelingly, "Can't say, I'm sure, Sir"—except one who testified to having heard say that they was expecting a gale at Brighton. This terrified the Poet, who passed the remainder of that railway-carriage in catechizing a very stout old lady and an intelligent spinster concerning seasickness, its cause and cure. The trying crisis of arriving quite close to the terrible ocean and not seeing it, was passed through in dumb silence, and then, as the train sauntered easily into the harbour-siding, arm-in-arm (or handle-in-arm) with a row of porters it recognized on the way, peace came to the soul of the Poet, and swagger and defiance of the billows set in. For not only was the sea a sheet of glass, but expert testimony came from our particular porter that we were sure of a smooth crossing to-day; though it had been blowing hard in the morning, and he expected a bad change shortly after our arrival at Calais. This gave us the position of the most favoured nation, and seemed to call for liberality in tips.

Once safely on board, Beppino strutted about the deck in a plaid railway wrapper, and felt like Francis Drake or Sebastian Cabot. The tension having come to an end, he tendered retrospective recognition of former experiences of mine, and reminded me I was a widower by a certain considerate minor key in his voice. "Of course you're used to this sort of thing, Juvence," said he. But I was not thinking on the same line as he,—but of how Janey and I crossed from Folkestone to Boulogne to go to Normandy; and how the sea now was not so blue as then, nor the gulls so white.

By the time we arrived in Paris the Poet had persuaded himself that he was familiar with life abroad. He seemed rather disconcerted at the virtuous dulness of the French metropolis, having expected a city on the lines of Our Correspondent in the morning paper taken in at Poplar Villa. I forget what paper it was; but this column was redolent of chic, and can-cans, and gay and lightsome occurrences of every kind; almost always resulting in dissatisfaction to some lady's husband. We should not have had any excitement at all, if our *cocher* had not got locked into a jam of vehicles in a narrow street and used very bad language. The chaos of execration and badinage that ensued was, however, only French for what you might hear any day in London, delivered more volubly. There was nothing plummy or wicked about it. Beppino was disappointed, and I think rather frightened. But he got some consolation from the many portraits of forward young women, all of them evidently no better than they or any one else should be, who threw the whole force of their fascinations into persuading you to take aperients. After dinner, at the Hotel, we strolled out and got coffee and cognac in the open, and a very pleasant fat woman with an equally pleasant fat baby put a little automatic doll to dance on the pavement for our delight, and probably remembers us with gratitude to this day. But the multitude of complete families that were having, or had had, their evening meal at marble tables in the street, seemed a shock to the Poet's sense of immorality, which he had hoped would be gratified by a visit to Paris. I explained to him that the parents never belonged to one another, however plausible they seemed. "In fact," I said, "it's only by the merest chance a French lady ever marries her own husband." Beppino then distinguished that I wasn't in earnest, and we went into a café chantant to see some real life. An unemployed vivandière was singing an arch song too fast for either of us, and occasionally kicking a Pierrot, much taller than herself, on the head, apparently without difficulty. Nobody could have predicted it of her—she was so very plump. After this it was no great surprise that she should climb up him somehow and stand on his head. I didn't like to tell my companion that I had gathered from a heard word or two that this couple were united in lawful wedlock, and that domestic bliss was the leading idea of the performance. It was altogether too respectable.

We had made up our minds to travel all night. But I think if I had realized how intensely sleepy a Poet could be I should have insisted on staying the night in Paris. And not only was he intensely sleepy, but he could no more sleep upright than a toy-tumbler with a weighted head. First he fell over to the right on a pair of French honeymooners who had covered themselves with one rug, and who came out to say that Monsieur was *très maladroit*. Then when I had pacified them, and got them to bed again, Beppino rolled over to the left on a Baron who was harbouring a live fowl somewhere, which had puzzled me by crowing at intervals. As Beppino was only equal to saying, "Whoo—I say! What's the French for 'sorry'? Je suis bien fâché, Monsieur," I had to do more apologies. This sort of thing in the green-shade darkness of a veiled light, skinned at intervals, makes up the oppressive life of the nocturnal railway-carriage—always to me the worst of all between Paris and Basle. Then, as you have just won a position, and are getting a little sleep, you shoot into a sudden benighted station inhabited by a forgotten functionary with a lantern, who to annoy you asks to see your ticket, and shows indifference when you produce it. And you subscribe to the opinion that the Turkish system of simply keeping the victim awake is the cleverest torture man has yet hit upon. Outside, in the darkness, the endless yell of the whistle through the night, and almost before the tink-tink-tink of the test-hammers on the axles has had time to report favourably on one, the cry of "En voiture, Messieurs, en voiture!"

Consolation comes at Basle.—Coffee is always coffee abroad (though sometimes an appalling calamity in England) and fresh trout is a great consolation—to those who get it. I wish you may, next time you are at Basle. We were lucky, and went ahead refreshed. Then the Poet, who was very bad about German, wanted to know what a *nicht-raucher* was, evidently thinking it was the name of a wild beast. We felt emancipated from the clutches of the night, and conversed cheerfully. The engine began to complain of having to go uphill; and then towards luncheon-time three young German Fräuleins, who were taking a little refreshment to keep them going, suddenly started up shouting, "Schau—schau—schau!"

And what we were to *schau* was the Alps. And Janey was not with me to see them.

Beppino was on his guard against admiration, and showed such watchfulness and discipline that I hoped maturity was going to set in. The amount of cunning he exhibited in the protection of his *amour-propre* was equal to that of a full-grown Critic. The Jungfrau (I think he said) was greatly overestimated; which may have been the case, but I have never seen an estimate. But he made some concession to the outline of Pilatus. I forget whether the railway went beyond Lucerne in those days—I fancy it did, but we went by the boat to see the sights. I can remember Beppino in his *secundum artem* suit, very tourist of very tourist, walking about the deck with a double-barrelled telescope and a Baedeker, and conversing affably with wandering Anglo-Saxons until detected and consigned to oblivion. If he had been content not to pretend, he might have been "that interesting young man we met on the boat," in several English and American families. But he preferred to strut, and fell in their esteem accordingly. He was much more circumspect when I was in the conversation. He was dreadfully afraid of me.

We stopped at Brunnen for the night, and Beppino purchased an Alpenstock. My recollection is that there were already some names of inaccessible peaks carved on the handles, which the owner would have ascended if his inclination had been greater, and that of the mountain less. I explained to him that it would be no use on the diligence across the St. Gotthard. He was really relieved when I told him the road was as clear of dangers as the Old Kent Road, and felt he could climb imaginary Matterhorns in peace. His next severe trial was sitting still on the top of the Diligence while it skidded down dreadful steeps with nothing but stone sugar-loaves to prevent its going off the road and over a precipice. But a promise of an easier time was at hand, and when the rock tunnel came that lets the traveller into a sunny Italy, the Poet felt reassured.

And then we descended into Heaven, and at the end of every new solo of the skid that shrieked on the wheel the sun was warmer. And the Ticino roared and thundered along its private road that it has made for itself in all these long past ages, and called out to the coach above that it, too, was on the way to Italy and was glad. For it had had a hard, cold time on those cruel moraines up there behind us, and now the sun had set it free. What the Poet made of the music of the cataracts below I can't say; but I was pretty clear it was a hymn of praise to Helios, and that the rich grape clusters on the increasing vines wanted to join in it audibly, and call attention to the benefit they too had received. But practice forbade them—and they could not even hold their tongues, having none; even as one's partner at whist has none, and trumps.

Children are precious everywhere. Even the beer-slopped midget of the beery vermin of a beery London suburb is precious, and one yearns to pick it out of the beer as a fly out of the milk. But oh how precious are the swarms of babies that come out to see the coach go by, when it goes by on a strada, and they come out of casas and quartieri that their babbo can hardly pay the appiccione of—when their voices are out of all proportion to their compact minuteness, and a crowd of them bubble out music like a grove of nightingales—when, in short, they are bambini! Every little pair of feet seems to be carrying an irreplaceable jewel, a germ of endless possibilities in manhood, into all the dangers and most of the dirt that two recently opened black eyes can see their way to; every little pair of hands to be seeking something to put together, or something else to pull to pieces. And there are such a many of them, and they seem so cheap!

But in that land where we were they are not in the market. You may, if you like, pick them up and hug them, while regretting their defective hygienic arrangements, but buy them you can't, whatever may be the case farther south. I recall two especially, somewhere near Bellinzona, close to a water-mill, where we stopped a few minutes, who were engaged thoughtfully on a most beautiful mud-pie. I suppose they had seven years between the two. I was fain to pick up the smallest and kiss it. Its name, as I learned, was Idomeneo Pellegrini, and its face was solemn. It was not alarmed, and returned my attention courteously, printing off one of its hands on my forehead. I was obliged to wash it off when we got to Lugano in the small hours of the morning. I was sorry. He was to me the baby I should have passed on to Janey when I had done with him, had Janey been there. How she would have enjoyed Idomeneo Pellegrini.

But Janey was not there, and I could only half enjoy him by myself. I left him and his friend going on with the mud-pie thoughtfully in the valley of the Ticino five-and-twenty years ago. Perhaps a baby of his is making a mud-pie there now.

We got to Lugano, as I said, and the sleepiest cameriera that ever was waked by an 'ostler shouting Mariuccia to her, and banging at her door, came out and got us a candle, and showed us a room and forsook us rapidly, leaving us without matches. Whereupon the candle tumbled on the ground and we were left in the dark in a silent palace, and had to shout to Mariuccia, who didn't hear. However, at last Fiammetta came and rescued us, which did just as well. I am ashamed to have to record though that Fiammetta boxed Beppino's ears for him before she left. I had to explain to him that he was no longer in England. I wonder if Fiammetta ever thinks now of that impertinent young Signore Inglese, and how the slap resounded.

Nothing of any interest occurred during the rest of the journey to Milan—indeed, if I were asked why I have thought the foregoing worth writing I should be puzzled to say. My business detained me in Milan; and in a day or two Beppino was bored, and as he was getting accustomed to his surroundings, and I noticed that he was keeping at a respectful distance from every ragazza, I raised no objection to his going on to Florence by himself. "But, I say, Juvence," said he, "what am I to do about that blessed portmanteau? It's all ripped open."

"There's a trunk-maker just down by the arches," said I. "You can say to him, 'Mi occorre rammendare un baule rotto—Hotel Sorrento—Subito, subito!' Or suppose I come with you—perhaps I'd better."

"Won't the Hotel people get it done for me?"

"Of course they would. But they are human, and their interesse is for you to stop on. Twig?"

"What a race of double-dyed scoundrels foreigners are! But you're a dear good filler, Juvence, and you'll come along with me and explain, won't you?"

"With pleasure. Or, stop a minute! We can do better than that. You can take my trunk—it's the same size as yours. And I can easily get yours mended after you're gone."

"Good filler you are, Juvence! Then I can go at once."

"Catch the next train—this evening! You'll just have time to dine comfortably if you go now and pack your things into my box. I'll come and see your luggage booked. And I'll wire now to the Minerva at Florence to make sure they have a bed for you. Of course they will, but it's well to wire. Cut along and get packed." He did so, but presently reappeared.

"I say, Juvence, there's your name, 'Vance,' written large on the portmanteau. Shan't I get in some row about that?"

"Not a bit. If any one says anything, pretend you think he asked for *una lira,* and give it him. But nobody will. They don't look at names where tickets are given for luggage."

"Of coarse not!" This was said with a pronunciation which implied, "As if I didn't know that!"

"Besides you can say it isn't a name at all—say it's a place—name of your villa residence near *Londra.* They'll only put it down as another forester's eccentricity. They look on us as mere children, and quite unaccountable. But tie on a label with your proper name on it. They'll call you Torpay."

Which Beppino did, and departed. I wasn't sorry to be rid of him. When he had gone I sat in the front garden at the Sorrento and made tobacco rings from the smoke of a Trabuco, and wished twopenny cigars fit to smoke could be had in England. A small boy climbed up outside the railings, and laughed with Lossie's laugh, filling the whole place. And I passed him through the rails a more substantial meal than he had for some time; Janey would have done so. And this ragazzino ate it all up as he would have eaten it then. But when he went away the song he made to dance down the street with was not what he would then have made. It was

"Il signore forestiere,
Il signore forestier—"

and had Janey been there it would have been *la Signora.* It did not add to my sadness, or my hunger for the end, to think all this. It was as it was. Nor was my longing to see Lossie crossed by any fear of a counter-clash of two feelings. I say what I mean quickest when I say that I knew we three knew all about it, and understood. I only looked to Lossie to bring me a precious gift of tears I could not get elsewhere. Should I meet her in Italy? I went to bed and dreamed of the Baron, and the cock that crew all through the night in that miserable railway-carriage.

A letter came to me at Milan about five days after, announcing the Poet's safe arrival. I did not fret about him, as I knew all about the Post-Office in Italy in those days. Probably it has improved. His letter said Tuscany had taken the matter of his name in hand, and settled it in its own way. He was Vanchay, not Torpay, and remonstrance was ineffectual. If he got in the thin end of the wedge of explanation with the Commissioner in the *ingresse* of the Hotel, who spoke English, German, French, and Russian equally well (or ill), the waiter in the *sala da pranzo* came out and undid it all by affirming the accuracy of Vanchay against all comers. And when the unfortunate Beppino shouted, as one shouts to him who says "Ho capito" and (as Beppino added) doesn't capito at all, and was beginning to make him see the truth of the case, a pestiferous cameriera from the landing above claimed powers of interpretation, and cut in with "Thus says the Signore, that one makes a sbaglio when one calls him Torpé. He is really Vancè." The idea of Beppino's convulsive efforts to obtain his name, always with a reverse result, was laughable enough. He ended his letter by saying he should have to accept Vanchay, as even an Italian lady at the Hotel had failed to procure Torpay for him, although she spoke English fluently. And then it had turned out that she herself had misunderstood, and made matters worse!

"It's got grimed in now," wrote he, "and I can't get a chance. However, I suppose it really doesn't matter." I too supposed then that it really *didn't* matter.

CHAPTER XLV

JOE'S RETURN HOME. MR. SPENCER AND COMTE. HIS BAD NEWS ABOUT DR. THORPE'S AFFAIRS. A FORGOTTEN TRUST FUND. THE DOCTOR BANKRUPT. LOSSIE'S RETURN FROM INDIA.

I RESOLVED to saunter about a little in the north of Italy until I should know definitely when Lossie and her husband were coming. I finished my business in Milan, and not finding anything very interesting in the town, went on to Bergamo, Brescia, and Verona, idling about void of purpose; and building on the chance of Lossie's arrival. I was afraid when she got to Italy she might be tempted to stop on into the spring. A London winter, after the sun-world of the south, is far from tempting. So I kept on hoping to see her in Italy before returning to the land of hushed speech and tied houses and All the Winners. But my hopes were dashed when I got to Venice, where I had told Bony to send letters; as it made the end of a fortnight's slow progress through the above three towns. General Desprez and his family had been detained later than was expected, and would not reach Rome, where they would stop first, till October. It would not be fair to Bony to leave the business so long. So, after a week in Venice, chiefly in a gondola, I cut my own stay short and came back. I should not have stayed so long, only I felt I ought to consider Venice, and give her my valuable company for a week; especially as *she* would never be able to understand that I really did not care about *anything at all.* I remember thinking how nice it would be if the Fondaco dei Turchi, some fine moonlight night when I passed in a gondola, would fall over and crush me once for all and have done with it. In those days the Fondaco was on crutches and seemed on its last legs. It has been set up again since then, without the aid of all the king's horses and all the king's men, and is quite spick and span. It did not fall, and I came back a roundabout way through Trieste, Vienna, Munich, and Strasburg—then down the Rhine to Cologne and somehow to Antwerp and London by a boat called, I think, the *Baron Osy.* All that wandering left little to recollect, and I was very glad when I got back and was giving the presents I brought with me to little Archie and Flixie, Jeannie's children.

I had not been away over a month, and of course I expected extraordinary changes on my return. The crowd of events in a short tour seems always to imply to the traveller an equal supply of incidents at home during his absence. And of course nothing had occurred. I went the day after my arrival to Frognall, and turned into the library, to feel illogical surprise at its identity. Mr. Spencer wasn't back yet, Missus wasn't up. So I sat down in the old chair—my first chair in that house—but took out a book. I did not choose it, but took it up at random. When I found it was "Peter Simple" it brought back my first visit, and how full of Lossie I was in that schoolboy time. And, mind you! I did not remember the non-Lossie part of that visit then nearly so clearly as it has come back to me since, while writing this. But I read on in "Peter Simple" and came to the old place and the explanation of flapdoodle. And I looked up at the little mirror on the table—there it stood as of old, on a little base of silver-work—but the room I saw in it was empty, and when I had looked before I had seen a little girl—half shy, half bold—approaching circumspectly through scattered incidents of furniture. Dull and stony I sate, and dreamed through what came back of our childish talk, till I came to the end, and my memory of the little girl used the words I remembered her using again so well—her last words to me as hope died in my heart, as I fought the waters in vain. "Mind you recollect——"

Yes—I would try hard to keep that promise. But it was so hard not to grieve. If only the tears could come, and I might feel less like a dry wood-chip, aching.

As I write this for myself, not for you, I shall add now something you will not understand; an odd experience of a mind strained by sore tension, not self-controlling, but forced to take its course by stray impulses, coming Heaven knows how! As my memory came to "Mind you recollect," Lossie's knock at the door followed, and she came in and brought again exuberance of life, and the idea that all the blinds had been drawn up and the sun had come out. I could almost hear again the stimulated singing of the bird. The effect upon me was that I broke into a torrent of tears;—not the very first perhaps that I had shed since, but the first of relaxation, almost of luxury. Grief had a new form that I could welcome, and I was an aching wood-chip no longer. I was grateful for that memory of a girl with sunny hair blown across her brow and long lashes to gray-blue eyes that looked so seriously at the boy that once was *me*. And that little thing that stood there still, in my memory, finishing that peppermint drop, was Janey, my wife that was gone; that I could see and hear no longer; that I had lost touch of in that dark and dreadful sea.

I could say none of this to my father-in-law. It would only make him talk about the Choir Invisible and how the dead were really with us still, only they weren't. He had found consolation among Positivists many years before, and had committed himself so often to the sufficiency of Comte to a well-regulated mind, during a period of happy exemption from home-thrusts of Death, that he could not well surrender at discretion because he was hard-hit in his first general engagement. He was (if a person who has not gone much into these matters may venture on such an explanation) an example of a Christian who had endeavoured to strain off the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene from the scum and the dregs of the World and the Churches, and had never been able to decide on the mesh of his strainer. He and I and Janey had often talked vaguely on the subject, and he always seemed to me to be endeavouring to find a sieve that would let Christ through, and keep the Miracles out. Do what he would the Resurrection slipped past. The stone that was rolled away from the Sepulchre broke a hole in the mesh, and the Gadarene Swine found it out and came through with a rush, and then a new sieve had to be provided and the whole operation repeated. There was one thing clear, that due account had to be taken of what the Laws of Nature would permit. And though Mr. Spencer didn't include them in his own Legal acquisitions, it was very well known that they were pretty well known in Albemarle Street. But personal application (so to speak) for a reference to the original Codex of Nature having led to no production of an attested copy, poor Mr. Spencer was thrown back on choosing between the interpretations of the churches (or rather *an* interpretation of *some* Church) and pure Negation, unless some form of compromise could be effected. He had seemed to find satisfaction in Comte, though I never could trace out its source. His continued adhesion under strain I felt did him credit, and I did not want to disturb it. So when he came into the library, and read my thought in my face, I gratefully accepted the way he held my hand and looked at me as sufficient recognition of the past, and let me go on to other matters. He had something on his mind to tell me.

"You've seen Dr. Thorpe, of course, Joseph," said he.

"No, only my partner and his family so far. I only came home yesterday evening."

“You were good to come to us first,” he said. “But the Doctor will want to see you as soon as you can go. Of course yo got my letter?”

“No, indeed—no letter has come. What is it?” For I wa alarmed, naturally.

“It is less serious than we anticipated,” said he, leaving m still in complete ignorance, in his anxiety to minimize some evi he had to tell.

“But what is? *What* is? Do for Heaven’s sake, dear Padrone tell me all about it.” This is a name I used to call him by. Whe it began I forget.

“I wrote a long letter to Milan to tell you all about it. Yo recollect those papers you sent me—the Dumfries and Kincardineshire Bank smash? Well! It appears that poor Thorpe wa one of three Trustees for a large sum in Bank Shares. He ha completely forgotten it or never knew it. The dividends wer regularly paid into a Bank. The other Trustees died—one i Stepney Workhouse infirmary; the other I believe was a Missionary on the Niger, and a tribe he was converting dined off him Anyhow, the matter wasn’t properly looked after. And so it wen on for thirty years. An Archdeacon’s widow, who was the part concerned, received her dividends and asked no questions. An there were the shares still standing in the names of the three Thorpe being the only survivor, and the estates of the others *nil.’*

“But the upshot, Padrone, the upshot? The Doctor never ca he held liable for this money!”

“I’m afraid!” said Mr. Spencer. “I’m afraid!” And having made his communication, my father-in-law retired into hi shell of caution, and would say little more on the subject.

“What’s all this, Doctor, about the Dumfries Bank?” was m first question to Dr. Thorpe next day, asked as early as I could get to him to ask it, a short preliminary for greeting being discounted.

“Money matters, Joe, money matters,” said he. “Money matters *don’t* matter. Don’t let you and me fret about them.”

“But how much money is it that doesn’t matter in this case?”

“Never mind, Joe. It will be all right in the end. How di you leave the Poet?”

“Oh, hang the Poet! At least, I hope he’s all right. Of cours I’ve heard nothing of him for three weeks. But how much i the money? Do tell me about it, Doctor.”

And thus urged he told me all about it. It was fifteen thousand pounds, neither more nor less, for which the failure of this Bank had made him legally liable. It was money held in trust for a relation, under a marriage settlement he had protested against being forced into when he was quite a young man. He had been under the impression for some twenty years past that the Trust was wound up; and had any change in the disposition of the funds been made he must have known, as his signature would have been required. But the dividends had calmly found their way to Coutts's through all that long time, and the lady who was their lawful owner had received them and promoted Christianity among the Jews with them, and restored some old churches to a condition they had never been in before. For a long time past there had been (so said prophecy post actum) suspicions that the Bank was shaky; and now all that everybody would have said, had he spoken out the secrets of his prophetic heart, had come exactly as he so considerately refrained from saying it, and the Bank had suddenly gone smash. The worst of it was that the Doctor was liable as a shareholder in the Bank, and the liability was not limited. Had he only had to settle with his *cestui qui trusts* it would have been easier; but he and his fellow shareholders had to face the liabilities, and, to be brief, the Doctor was Bankrupt.

"I don't blame anybody, Joe," said he, "except my family, who took their part in flailing and thwacking and drubbing and hooting a young man of my then age, five-and-thirty years ago, into a position he did not understand the rights of, and for which he was totally unfitted. I simply acquiesced in what seemed to me then a mere formality, a kind of good-natured courtesy to a relative. I had no idea I was going security for anything, and I soon forgot all about it. I haven't, for twenty years certainly, been asked to sign any document which would remind me this Trust existed. In fact, I thought the whole thing had come to an end long ago. The last document I signed probably was a request to pay all dividends into my cousin's account at Coutts's. The other two trustees seem to have died and made no sign—probably they too had forgotten all about it. Spencer says the legalities were improperly managed. Very likely! They often are. But that's no consolation. What does it matter to me whether those Joint-Stock Bank Shares were a permissible investment under the settlement? It comes to the same thing in the end. I am the sole holder of fifteen hundred ten-pound shares in a smashed Bank, and am liable for my share of its creditors' claims, and also for the fund I had in Trust to its actual owner. Spencer says I shall have my claim as a shareholder as well as my liability. But that is a will-of-the-wisp! Take your hands out of your sleeves and open your lips and don't glare, dear old Joe. It doesn't really matter. All will come right in the end."

I suppose the Doctor's stage-direction to me applied to what an Italian would have called an analogous attitude on my part, as I sat facing him in his old chair that turned on its axis. I transferred each hand to its breeches pocket, suppressed the glare, and spoke.

"What *is* the end? The Bankruptcy Court?"

"I believe I shall have to attend at that Court and make affidavits. And Poplar Villa will be put up for sale. Probably Nolly and Vi and Loss will buy it and its contents and let me remain on as a caretaker. I wonder if the court compels sale by Auction—blest if I know!" And the Doctor took a very long pinch, and seemed to enjoy both it and his prospects.

"But," he went on, "*that's* not the end I was referring to.—When that will come I don't know. Probably all will be much righter than anything we can imagine within a reasonable time, say a million years. Then we can settle down comfortably to the enjoyment of Eternity."

"All right, Doctor. But what do the others say about it?"

"Vi lays claim to having predicted it. But she doesn't appear to be quite clear about the circumstances. She regards it as a moral lesson to people that *don't* have marriage settlements. Nolly looks forward with professional zest to getting me a first-class certificate, and then placing his whole income at my disposal. His wife Maisie opens her eyes as wide as Portland Place and says why not? She can always find time to sign cheques, she says, and Nolly can always go to her for money. She's given him a book full of signed cheques to anticipate demands, and is under the impression that if he overdraws he can write a cheque for the amount and send it to the Banker."

"Bony knew nothing about this."

"Why should he, if he didn't happen to see Spencer?"

"Isn't Aunt Izzy dreadfully upset?"

"She is. I think she knows something has gone wrong about money, and is much concerned. But what she thinks it is, I don't know. Nor does Nolly. You know Nolly and his wife are coming to-night?"

I didn't, but they were, and came. Also Aunt Izzy appeared in due course, and we went in to dinner. Nolly's wife Maisie rather justified the way some of their friends described them as Nolly and Dolly. One had an impression that, if one could devise a plausible pretext for the search, one might find the end of a wire somewhere, which would open and shut her eyes. She kept up her old intimacy with Jeannie, and was Aunt Maisie at Cheyne Row. Little Flixie had christened her most portentous daughter after her, a daughter whose legs were waxen half-Wellingtons, pulled on to a core with a strange flavour, and Bony and I used to laugh about the likeness.

It was after dinner and had come to real home-grown peaches off the end wall of the garden, when Aunt Izzy became invested with her old dim genteel remote air, noticed by Lossie, and thus addressed her brother across the table.

"I'm sure, Randall, you must recollect our second cousin Sarah Carmichael-Jackson, that married Archdeacon Threlfall of Haleswick in Somersetshire. Not Kate Carmichael-Jackson. She had a hare-lip and never married, but Sarah."

The Doctor assented to Sarah, and Aunt Izzy proceeded. "Well, dear, I'm afraid she lost a great deal of money, because I remember when I was a girl there was always a botheration about her settlement money, and I remember it was all put in the Dumfries and Kincardineshire Bank, and now the newspaper says *a* Dumfries and Kincardineshire Bank has smashed up. Sarah was a rather bony girl with a slight limp, and they say she had a short temper and led the Archdeacon a life. But her cousin Lady Penelope Carmichael-Jackson, etc., etc., etc."

And Aunt Izzy broke loose among the well-connected, and had a high old time. The Doctor didn't interrupt her. "I'll try to explain to-morrow," said he. "I shall have to write her a letter under her eyes."

Memory cheats me now, and slips away. I cannot bring her to book. This is almost twenty-five years ago, remember! Then how come I to recollect all the incidents I am narrating? The answer is that I don't, if you mean remember every word, every gesture; every thought of my own, every cough of my neighbour. No part in my tale is quite true in that sense. But then none is false. I recollect the substance by gusts, and the above visit at the Doctor's was a gust that blew steadily.

After this the puffs of wind are very intermittent and only now and then raise a ripple on the surface of the puddle. The surface is but little ruffled until the return of Lossie, who with her husband got to Rome in the October following, and remained there over Christmas. They then took a villa near Sorrento, and being kept reassured about the Doctor's affairs by carefully written letters, were persuaded not to risk exposure to the north an to remain at Sorrento till the following April.

Now anybody would have thought Beppino would have rushe south to meet his sister. But he didn't. He wrote her mos affectionate letters, which delighted her, many of which she sen on to me, to show me what a darling the Poet was, and ho true and affectionate. But though he was always going next week he never went until the ensuing Easter, when he contrived t interfere with a visit of Lossie to Florence by taking it into hi head that he ought to see Rome at Easter in the interest o Art. He wrote to her at this time: "For I, so I say, am Poet. Roman nature, behoves that I know it." And he certainly went to Rome, and Lossie and her husband and childre met him there, and stayed on to be with him. But it mad them so late that Sir Hugh could not possibly stop on fo Florence; and Lossie did not care to go alone, and also wa anxious to be with her Father again as soon as the spring wa warm enough for the children. This seems trivial detail, but has a bearing on my story. It is quite possible that had Lossie gone to Florence, some doings of Master Beppino's there would have come out which would have seriously affected the current of events. As it was, the whole party arrived early in May at Charing Cross Station, where I met them, and Lossie cried over me in the station without disguise. I can feel her arms round my neck still, and Hugh's great strong hand that took mine and trembled as he pressed it; and the same face, grayer now, that I had seen in the mirror at Oxford, with the same look on it. "Oh, my poor boy!—my poor boy!" cried Lossie. "All alone!"

But no! Now I come to think of it, she did not say the last two words. Yet she and I thought them in such unison that it came to the same thing.

CHAPTER XLVI

LOSSIE—SHE HAS NO PATIENCE WITH DR. THORPE'S VICTIM. BEPPINO AND MISS FULLER PERCEVAL. A MYSTERIOUS LETTER FROM FLORENCE. BEPPINO'S EXPLANATION. THE CENOTAPH IN PORTUGAL. JOE CARRIES THE TURK PAST THE DOCTOR'S LIBRARY DOOR. O GRAVE! WHERE IS THY VICTORY?

THAT was a strong ripple of the Memory pool. The next one brings back a talk with Lossie in the old garden at Poplar Villa. It is a perfect evening in June, and dinner is to be ever so late, please, that we may not lose the sunset. And we are not losing it. We have been watering the plants, and the smell of the water is sweet in the great heat, and mixes with the scent of the new-mown hay. And the rhythmic ring of the scythe of Samuel, growing ever thinner and thinner, sings the song I know so well, about a little boy who picked stewing pears in that tree; and about a many things that shall be, long years after, fresh in that boy's grown-up mind, and not all forgotten, as I think, by Lossie.

But of course I cannot guess how much of those early days she remembers now, in that Florence she failed to visit then, where most likely she will, as the phrase is, end her days. On that June evening she remembered a good deal and talked about it.

"Well now," said she, "you *are* an oblivious old Joe. You don't mean to say you've forgotten *that?*"

"Forgotten what?"

"Kiss your uncle Joe, Poppy, and call him an old slow-coach. Why, of course, when Nolly lost his pet snake, and you and he went all along the road asking about it at every house. And old Mr. Tremlett went round and complained to the Police." Poppy was the little girl. She dutifully obeyed her mamma, and her uncle Joe can still shut his eyes and think of it with pleasure. She called me an Oat-oat-oats.

"Of course I recollect that, Loss," said I. "Old Mr. Tremlett's flute wouldn't blow next day, and when he took the top joint off, the snake's head stuck out and waggled, and wouldn't hold still for him to get it on again. He came round here wild with terror, and Noll and I went back with him and captured the serpent."

"Oh, dear—the heat!" said Lossie. "It's as hot as India!"

"Come I say, Loss! Draw it mild!"

"Well—as hot as India when the thermometer's the same. No! It's worse. At least, it's worse in London. The air's so stuffy. Don't let Miss Desprez quite choke you. You dear, good, patient uncle Joe! Leave off kissing your uncle, Poppy! it's too hot and sticky for anything. Come off!" And Lossie rescued me from her daughter's clutches, and sat down opposite me on some of the hay-crop. She sat there, just like her old self, filled out and rounded, with her hands round her knees like the schoolgirl of twenty years ago. There was the hair-bracelet just as formerly, but fitting a little tighter.

"How nice it is," said she, "that we've still got the Villa. Just think what it might have been if we hadn't all been so rich. Fancy an auction at Poplar Villa." It was a gruesome idea, and we shuddered. "But that's all safe, at any rate. Hugh says it's all right, because poor old Lord Fitzbroughton is sure to die long before the Bank affairs culminate. And you know when that happens Hugh will come into a lot of property, though he won't have the title. I'm glad of that, but sorry we shan't get the old place—Stoats-Leaze, you know. It's just like Chesney Wold, and I should have liked it. But I don't understand the details about the Bank."

"The details are easy enough. Don't you see it's like this——"

"Go on and tell—only don't say assets and liabilities, or debit and credit, because I never know which is which. Yes, my precious pet! You shall go to sleep on Mamma, and squeeze up. Only you really ought to be in bed, ducky!" And Poppy's mamma let her knees go, and accommodated the applicant.

"All right, Loss! It's very simple. The creditors are to find out how much can be screwed out of the Doctor, and we four have guaranteed the amount. We shan't have to square up till the shareholders have done wrangling. Hugh wants to pay my share. But I can't be kept out of it and Maisie's father get in—if I know it! The Doctor was always like my father—one of my fathers, I should say."

The grave gaze of Lossie's eyes as she sat there in the sunset light, with the stray uncontrollable lock of hair stirring in the sunset wind, reflected, I know, what the recollection of my own Father showed in mine.

"Poor dear old Joe," said she, after a moment's silence. And then resumed the conversation reflectively:

"He was a good, creditable old Earl to behave like that. You know I was here the day he came. Of course Papa said it was quite impossible at first. But the old boy was so urgent, saying that all his property was no use to him if he was to be made miserable for life—and he certainly would if Dr. Thorpe, whom he had revered all the thoughtful half of his life, was put up to auction. So, as I understand, Nolly isn't to be allowed to contribute, as a set-off. Wake up, Popsy darling! She ought to be in bed by now, it's so late. You may carry her up to Nurse, dear Joe, for a treat, if you like. She won't wake, I know. Nurse will put her to bed without waking her. She did the other night."

"Why not let well alone? She's sleeping like a top. What more can you have? The others will be back soon." For the two elder ones and a couple of cousins who were staying here with Aunt Vi had gone to an afternoon party with that aunt as guardian. "Let's keep her till they come back. She's such a treat."

"Yes—they're delicious when they're asleep. But when they're awake, they're Turks." So the Turk slept on; now and then, as I judged by a movement of her lips, kissing some other Turk in a dream.

"I'm afraid Papa is miserable about that detestable Mrs. Threlfall and her money. Oh no, Joe, it's no use trying to make me sorry for her. I've no patience with people of that sort!"

"I admit that she might have been nicer about it. But it was no fault of hers. The fault was in the blessed system of making every one a Trustee, whether or no. However, if the Bank pays ten shillings in the pound she'll get back half her money."

"But that won't make Papa's mind easy. He frets about it dreadfully. I'm sure that attack he had on Thursday was caused by that horrible letter of hers. 'Preying on the widow and the fatherless,' indeed! It's her own fault if she's a widow—she worried that poor little pot-bellied Archdeacon into his grave. And as for fatherless, when one's father is seventy-three when one's born, and one is sixty-eight oneself, how old would one's father be if he hadn't swallowed a cork that blew into his throat out of a soda-water bottle at seventy-five, when one was two? Do the sum, Joe!"

"Sixty and seventy's a hundred and thirty. Six and five's eleven. A hundred and forty-one. But most likely she was referring to her own children as the swindled orphans."

"She—children! She never had any.. Couldn't have! She might have had rocking-horses, or packing-cases; but she couldn't have had children. My precious!" Popsy had, I presume, kissed a Turk.

"I wish I had been here when the Doctor had that attack on Thursday. I can't make out if it was more or less than the one I saw before I went to Italy."

"I'm afraid he was in great pain. I only came in just as he was coming round. But that detestable woman's letter was on the table and I know it was that brought it on."

"Then I'm afraid it was worse. I wish something very pleasant would come about to counteract."

"Well, you know, if this affair of Beppino and Miss Fuller Perceval comes to anything, that *will* be something pleasant." For when Beppino returned with them in April, he had recommenced his attentions to Park Lane, with the additional advantage of his devotion having survived seven months' separation. He was getting a good deal of credit for this, especially with Lossie. "Fancy," said she, "the dear child out there by himself pining for his love!" Fancy, indeed! It appeared (shortly after his return) that he had a year previously offered his hand and heart to the heiress, and had made official application to the father. The latter had suggested that as his daughter was young, the genuineness of her sentiments should be tested by separation; and that a winter in Italy would not do the Poet any harm. This accounted for Beppino's readiness to go away with me—my proposal to take him was fortuitous, rather singularly so. He had corresponded intermittently with his adored Sibyl during the whole of his exile; but I suspect had engineered his desire to go to his sister at Sorrento as an excuse for delaying his return somewhat beyond date. There did not, however, seem to have been any doubt in her father's mind about *his* constancy. Perhaps a well-grounded faith in thousands a year prospective, and a handsome allowance down, contributed to this.

As this is not really a narrative, and it is an easement to me to be disjointed, I will interleave an incident of Beppino's return, before I resume my conversation with Lossie in the garden.

Just after the party started from Rome to return to London, meaning to stop a day in Paris by the way, a letter came to Poplar Villa addressed thus, and bearing the Florence postmark:

Illmo: Signore
Signor Giuseppe Vance
Villa Thorpè
BALHAMM Inghilterra

I naturally supposed this to be intended for me, and brought it away in my pocket. When I opened it, I was amazed to find a passionate love-letter, written in very Tuscan Italian, and signed *fino al tuo Bramatissimo ritorno la tua addoloratissima Annunciatina.* It began "Adoratissimo mio Beppino," and I had only to glance at the first and last words to see that it was not meant for me. A moment's further thought connected it with Beppino's involuntary adoption of my name. He had been at some folly, or wickedness; and some Italian girl had been duped or victimized by him. That was clear. But a natural reluctance to read another person's letter prevented my making myself master of its contents, as I might have done. I enclosed the letter back to him at once, and was free from further temptation to look at it. I determined, however, to speak to him about it, and tell him that (though I had not read it) what I had been unable to avoid seeing would reflect on him unless he could furnish some explanation. He anticipated me in this, speaking about it without embarrassment; but nevertheless (I thought I noticed) choosing a moment to do so, when we were alone, and not likely to be interrupted. His explanation was as follows: He was writing a novel, in which he had to supply love-letters in Italian, written by a girl whose husband or lover had deserted her. Although he had acquired some Italian during his stay in Florence, still he was not able to manage the letters without help, and he asked a lady whom he had recently met, who was half English, half Italian, to write him one or two samples. He had roughed one out in English and left it with her to translate for him, and for a joke had addressed it to himself; and she for another joke had signed her own name to the translation. Annunciatina Tornabuoni was her name (but her mother had been an Englishwoman), and she was married to an eminent Italian avvocato. "You wouldn't suspect Signora Tornabuoni of writing me a real love-letter if you saw her," said Beppino. "Her daughter might—only not very likely, as she's just going to be married to a man named Draper." It appeared very plausible, especially when Beppino produced a sheet of MS. of his novel containing an English version of the Italian letter, and showed the letter itself for me to compare the two. "But I say, Juvence," said he, "I know you'll be a dear good filler, and not say a word to any one, not even to Lossie, about the novel. I do so want to keep it a secret till it's finished." This supplied a reason for his confidential way of speaking to me, and I was quite taken in at the time, and indeed felt that I had done

Beppino injustice. "I had no idea she would write off so promptly," said he, "or I would have taken care to impress upon her that she really must direct to me by my real name. Of course if I had been here it wouldn't have mattered. He had been saying a good deal about the absurd way in which Vancé had been accepted and Thorpé rejected by his Florentine friends. So this seemed plausible, too. I will now go back to Lossie, whom I have left in the garden.

"That will be something nice," said she. "And he is so good, and always has been. And he seems completely devoted to her, and she to him." Lossie was looking at the sleeping Turk, luckily. So I had not to keep my countenance in check under difficulties. Perhaps if she had looked up at me I might still have succeeded in doing so, by recalling the Lossie of old, on that very grass-patch, and little Joey just the age of the Turk, three-and-twenty years ago. The image came to me in time to hearten me up to say something, I forget what, in praise of the Beppino he had changed into.

"But why did you say, Loss," I continued, "if it comes to anything?—I was regarding it as settled."

"Oh—I only meant that there are so many slips between the cup and the lip. Of course it is as good as settled. They'll be disgustingly rich, like me and Hugh. I think it is too bad, dear old boy! You're the only one of us that isn't as rich as Crœsus." And Lossie looked up from the absorbing Turk, and met my eyes, that said, "What should I do with all the gold, if I had it?" I had never a word to say, and said none. "Oh, poor Joe—poor old Joe," said she. "How one is always in want of Papa to say it will be all right in the end!" I recovered my voice. "It must be either all right, or we be all nothing. *That* won't hurt us! Just think what a lot of people are not in existence at all and never have been; and are absolutely, serenely happy! They are not in a position to give three cheers for non-existence, or I have no doubt they would." But in spite of this absurd metaphysical excursion, I felt I wanted Dr. Thorpe's refrain, or the chord of the Waldstein. Lossie took no notice of my nonsense. She paused as I thought to nip tears in the bud; and then harked back, taking my unspoken speech for granted.

"What would you have done with it, I wonder?"

"I've made up my mind what I shall do with Janey's settlement money—and Mr. Spencer quite agrees. I shall give it all to lifeboats—every penny."

"But then how about the——"

"The thing on the promontory?" For Lossie had hung fire over a column of marble I had told her I meant to place on the coast at San Joaquim. "I can manage that well enough."

"Joe dear! Before you settle it, do think about what I said. Make it twice as big and let me pay half, and only put my name in small in a corner—somewhere in a corner. It would make me so happy. Just think, Joe! It's over twenty years now since you were The Boy, and I showed you and Joey the black men perishing by thousands, you remember?"

"Rather. Especially because we never saw the black men, and I've felt sore about it ever since."

"Never mind! We'll find them. They must be in the house, and Poppy shall show us them. Won't you, my precious darling? But, dear Joe, you will think about what I say, and let me in."

"I don't think Janey will mind." A passing puzzle crossed Lossie's face.

"No—dear boy—I'm sure she wouldn't have minded." But I was obstinate. "I'm sure she won't mind," said I, and I looked her full in the face.

"Oh dear!" said she, with a sort of gasp. "How happy one could be if you and Papa were right!" For Lossie knew her Father's ideas; and that I to a great extent shared them; saw (so to speak) the sea he swam in, but dared not plunge in herself. I am not sure that she believed he was really afloat. She had once asked me if I didn't think his notion about the Ghost in the Corpse might not really be a mere re-echoing of the religious teaching of his childhood.

"May he not have thought St. Paul really meant what he said?" said she. "And may not that, and his own firm belief in the Resurrection of our Lord, have produced the sort of physical impression he speaks of, of being an Ego in a bottle? I think that's how he put it." And I had replied to this that the impression was still stronger in Janey, who had certainly not had a religious teaching like Dr. Thorpe's in her childhood. She had been brought up by a mother who erased whatever she thought nonsense from the Evangelists—leaving only plain, honest, straightforward common sense—and a father whose constant critical analysis naturally trained his children to regard revelation as a curious open question. Yet Janey's last words to me as the darkness closed over us, and left me to hold an unresponsive hand with the last of my failing strength, were spoken with confidence—not the confidence of mustered faith that rallies for a battle with doubt, but an easy certainty of a thing to be. However, I am travelling too far away from that garden.

"You know," I replied to Lossie's last remark, "I always feel the Conditional Mood is disloyal to Janey, when she herself was so clear about it. So I prefer the Indicative. I have got to think that way. It is she and the Doctor have made me——"

"Very well, dear Joe, it shall be your way. Janey won't mind if you do. So you'll let me—let us—go halves in the column. You've got the ground?"

"I wrote to the abadia, and got a letter in Portuguese. You wouldn't be any the wiser if I showed it you. But I know what's in it. They can't give up the fee-simple of any of their land, but I may put up the column almost anywhere I choose, and it will be safe from molestation. They will take charge of it. The letter says 'nothing changes here. The sea rolls, and the ships pass, but nothing changes. The Senhor may rest secure.' So it shall be as you wish, Lossie dear! That sounds like a dinner-warning. May I carry Popsy?"

I might, and I carried that unconscious scrap of soft, deep sleep into the house. I remember this all so well, as well I may! We go into the house up the little flight of stone steps that sticks out sideways from the wall, and Lossie says take care of her head. And I take care of her head. Then in the passage we are met by a tempest of older babies, just returning from the party. They hang on me and make me apprehensive about her head. Vi says *she* wouldn't trust her with me if she was Lossie. We pass the library door, as Anne, the nurse, says Master has gone to his room. But the tempest surges up the stairs, and I convey the Turk safely to her couch, still sleeping profoundly. As we pass the Doctor's dressing-room, I notice that the door is on the jar. He may have soon finished his slight preparations for dinner and be downstairs all the time. But then why did he never come out, with all that racket of excited children in the passage? It was not like him to let them pass up to bed unkissed. The two mothers are too much behind time for anything but immediate promptitude in dressing, and I don't fancy what occurs to me crosses the mind of any one else. He may be ill, in the Library.

They disperse to their rooms, and then I go down to the Library to see. No sound comes from the room to allay my anxiety, and I half lack courage to open the door. But he may be asleep.

I say, "It's dinner time, Doctor," but I hear misgiving in my own voice. No answer comes, and I pass in.

The Doctor is sitting in his old chair, where I sat on his knee and did Euclid. His head rests on his hand, and when I speak he does not move. I touch him and feel something amiss, and still he does not move. I go out, closing the door with absurd gentleness as if he slept. A servant is within call, whom I send at once for medical assistance. Then I go upstairs again, and knock at Lossie's door. She thinks it is shoes, and says put them down outside. I reply, "It's me—Joe. I want you," and she opens the door, pulling on a dressing-gown with a scared face. She sees half of it at once. "Then Papa's ill," she says. I say yes, and we go down to the Library. She goes up to the motionless figure on the chair, as I had done, and lays one hand on its shoulder, and says, "Papa." And then again, "Papa dear." But there is no movement, and she lays her free hand on the hand that I can see even in the dusk is too white—and starts back with a cry, and I prevent her falling.

There is a step behind us, and it is her husband—I am not quite unconscious of a kind of relief at the presence of the great strong man that has seen so many die. He takes Lossie from me, and I go upstairs to tell Vi—breaking it by a fiction of a dangerous attack—and to prevent the children knowing! Time enough for that next day! I remember every detail.

It is too late—even for injections of morphia—but it is as well to try. Trying only confirms its uselessness, and nothing is left for us now but the miserable activities that drag so heavily on the hearts of survivors. And then we say, and try to believe, that it is good to have to exert oneself. We all do so, except Violet, who breaks down. She is not a strong character, like her sister, who after the first shock is white, but resolute. Many things have to be done, and done promptly, and I stay on till late into the night. Then at last Lossie is prevailed upon to go to bed. She dares not go to sleep, she says, for fear of waking. Hugh and I look at the sleeping children for a respite, and then I go away towards the dawn, just breaking over London.

I do not care to accept the offer of a four-wheeler cab to take me, slower than I could walk, to a place I do not want to go to, for a sum the driver knows I should be ashamed to pay him at the end of the trip. I shun its damp and mouldy inner life, its incapable lurching, its windows that will neither come up nor stop up, its woe-begone one-horse power! I walk on through the sweetness of the morning, and think if the Spirit released from the Body were given a chance to return, what choice would it make? Would it shrink, as I did from that cab, and drink in the ether of a new life, as I drank in the smell of the new-mown hay? And I walk on in a strange state of mind that I can only describe as wondering if my fixed belief is really true. True or false, it was Janey and the Doctor had made it.

In a few days I was looking down into a new-made grave at a brass plate on which was the inscription "Randall Thorpe—Born 1806, died 1874." And I said to Hugh as we walked together from the Cemetery, preferring to discard the black coaches, "He was to me all a father could be, and more than most fathers are to any son." But the memory of my dear old Daddy was none the less in my mind, that I was able to think thus of my beloved old friend.

And then as the undertakers died away to the beer-shop, and left "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" to speak for itself, his own words, like the Chord in the Waldstein, rang in my mind again and again, "Leave it all in God's hands. All will be right in the end." And when Hugh and I got home, we found that Violet had been much dissatisfied with "the way things had been done" and implied that such miscarriage was due to some conspiracy of Atheists, not specified by name, but rampant.

CHAPTER XLVII

JOE'S ABSENCE FROM BEPPINO'S WEDDING. VULGARITY. BANALITY. ANOTHER LETTER FROM FLORENCE. JEANNIE DETECTS A FAINT SMELL OF A DEVIL. BUT BEPPINO GETS HIS LETTER.

If I were to note that Beppino married his heiress in due course, I should have done all that is needed for consecutiveness. As to why I did not go to his wedding, it was ostensibly because I was compelled to go over to Paris on business the day before; but actually for reasons which shall appear after I have stirred up my Memory puddle to see if anything comes to the surface about that expensive ceremonial. I don't know whether the intense absence of Vulgarity, or the price of the Orchids, has the first place in my recollection. The latter were at very high quotations; but I think the reason I recollect them, is because Lossie alluded to the pain it would give to be cauterized for one if you had it on the tip of your nose. She and I sympathized over Orchids, or rather antipathized in chorus. We were in a minority, and indeed hardly accounted worthy of scorn.

I realized during the period in which I looked forward to witnessing the wedding, that I was about to be inducted into a higher and purer atmosphere. The absence of vulgarity was anticipated and insisted on with denunciatory vigor; and I always felt when this was done in my presence that I was being pointed out as a painful example. I might be improved by my incidental hoist up Olympus, but should certainly backslide when let alone. It was no small consolation that Lossie was my companion in depravity—she being really as bad as myself. However, we could always admire prices, so Beppino told us about them that we might not be out in the cold. But he spoke over our heads to our superiors about the exquisite subtlety of the design of the Venetian lace Sibyl was to wear, adding details of date in an undertone for them, not for us. We received as little quarter in Art matters from Beppino as we did in religious ones from Violet. Reasons why, for this, were quite beyond my grasp. I don't know what either of us had done to provoke it.

Well then!—although I did not go to the wedding, Beppino and Sibyl were married. The affair came off in Somersetshire at Parrettsdown, where Mr. Fuller Perceval's country house was, in a Parish Church, which, though not large, is a perfect specimen of Tudor—at least it was then; but it has been judiciously restored since, I believe. They enjoyed the advantages of a full Choral Service, and of absence from Hanover Square. The wedding was implied to have scored heavily by not being at St. George's—it was even suggested that it took place in the country in order to avoid that saint. A good deal of trouble was always being taken to dodge banality. But when turned out at the door it came in at the window. I believe the Orchids were a case in point, being denounced as banal by an opposition bride, who flatly refused to have anything to say to Orchids and would have nothing but roses all through. If you search among the new varieties of Floriculture that appeared about '73, I think you will find a rose called the Barclay Bellasys, and an orchid called the Fuller Perceval. I saw the latter—it was like a lobster-claw hooked by its point to a gangrene. Both were christened as results of these weddings.

But Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Thorpe's orchids have nothing to do with my story? No, they haven't. But banality has, indirectly. For when Italy was proposed for their wedding-tour, Beppino arose and denounced that land of Cook's tourists as quite out of date. "Good Ged," he exclaimed, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage—Sam Rogers—oh law!" And Miss Sibyl had joined chorus—having evidently had the proper attitude indicated to her. It did not matter to the family whether the happy turtle doves went to Florence or Avignon, which was the final choice. Mr. Fuller Perceval was not in a position, owing to his life having been passed at meets of hounds, and in shooting over properties, varied with the curious interlude of being a Warming Pan in the House, to dispute his daughter's authority on belles lettres, beaux Arts, and so forth. So when he began, apropos of Florence, "But I thought Ruskin——" he was stopped by an appearance of amused despair on Sibyl's face; and two outstretched, out-thrown hands, surrendering all points, but appealing as it were to Heaven and the public to state a case for some other court. "Really—dear Papa—Ruskin!" said she. Beppino turned round appealingly to me with a smile of pity and the slightest shrug. For I was dining at the Park Lane palace by invitation—the only time I ever was in the house, by the way!—and had put my foot in the Arts, the Chace, and Political Life, all the evening. Beppino only gave me half his shrug, remembering in time what an Ishmael

I was; and passed on the remainder to a poor accidental gentleman who had somehow got asked by mistake; and who was so glad to be allowed inside the conversation that he became quite vociferous.

So it was decided that Florence was banal and Cook's-tourist —a new adjective—but that Avignon wasn't; at least not yet! It would be very soon, but we could go there for a little.

Now if all this had happened in the beginning of next century (how near it is now to the end of the nineteenth!)—it would have been quite, as I anticipated, in harmony with the accepted. Happening over twenty-five years ago, it shows how hard Beppino and his fiancée were to get abreast of. They were indeed advanced.

I was living at my own house now, as I had made the effort and gone back again after taxing Bony and his wife to the utmost pitch (so it seemed to me) of human patience. My stepmother had gone to her family at the farm in Worcestershire. It would have been more convenient to me to go into chambers, but I could not bear the idea of moving anything Janey had eft. Lossie and her husband and babies and her foreign retinue would have used the house readily, and I should have liked it; but then how about Poplar Villa, to which she clung as much as I did to my own home? Or rather, I should say, from dismantling which she shrank as much. I admitted to myself when I had made the change, that it really mattered very little where one was—for the rest of the time. That was the way I put it. The time has been, exactly reckoned, twenty-seven years. How ong will it have been at the end of it?

When I got home from Park Lane very late that night, which was in the spring not very long before Beppino's wedding, I found a heap of letters awaiting me. I was very sleepy, and very ll-humoured as one sometimes is after an ill-chosen dining-out. I had drunk the best of champagne, had smoked a priceless cigar, and kept up a lying pretence that though I wasn't in the confidence of Pall Mall and Downing Street, there was no particular reason why I shouldn't be, and had been ungrateful and beaten my host at billiards in the small hours of the morning. But as soon as I got away, I felt I had been a round man in a square hole or *vice versa;* and resolved I wouldn't have any more to do with Park Lane, or Park anything. Then I called myself a curmudgeon, and acknowledged that it was no fault of my hosts. After all, they could not be worldly at heart, or they never would have consented to this marriage. Then I bolted the top and bottom bolt, and put up the chain, and carried my letters up into the back drawing-room, where I kept all my writing traps because Janey had hers there; and sat down at her own writing-table and turned up the gas.

"Hullo!" It was I said this to myself. "Who's writing to me with the Florence postmark? And why to Poplar Villa?" For it had gone there, and been directed on by Lossie. "Why, of course," I pursued, to myself, "it's Beppino's lady-correspondent again. Why on earth can't he send her out a directed envelope, to start her?" But I was far too sleepy to solve the problem,—and I "bothered" all the other letters, and let them stay till to-morrow and went to bed.

When the young man who (acting in conjunction with, or defiance of, my cook) ran my household in those days came in with my hot water in the morning, I was half awake listening to a thunder-storm. "Pips," I said, "make less noise. I want to hear the thunder." For Janey used to enjoy listening to thunder; and even if I had not always been partial to it myself, I should have enjoyed it for that reason. Pips said, "Right, Sir," and the clap came like a great gun followed by musketry; and the rain, which had stood civilly waiting for the thunder to finish, came down like Niagara. In a few minutes the household realized that water was coming in in an empty top room, and Pips had been shouted to by his master to clear that front gutter. I mention this incident to account to myself for not thinking of that letter the moment I woke. In fact it never recurred to me until I was at breakfast.

"Why on earth that Italian woman goes on firing away to the Poet I can't imagine." But I didn't open the letter, and as there was a post-card from Lossie saying be sure to come to dinner to-night, because Professor Absalom was coming, I didn't send it back with explanations as I might have done. It would save me writing a letter if I took it with me. Besides I could give it to Beppino personally if he was there, and avoid explanations. I couldn't explain without letting out about the Novel.

"I hope you found your letter, Partner," said Bony to me at the Works that morning.

"What letter?"

"Letter from an Italian lady—looked as if Lady Desprez had directed it on. She'd put the wrong number."

"That's Jeannie, I know!"

"What's Jeannie?"

"Taking all that notice! You never saw it was from a lady, Bony. I know you better than that!"

"Well—you got the letter, anyhow." I had got the letter, and explained that it wasn't for me, but Beppino. I threw what light I could on the misdirection, giving Beppino's explanation in brief; but dwelling on the fact that I had seen Beppino's MS. novel. I saw Bony again that afternoon, after lunch. I myself had lunched in the city.

"I say, Joe," said he. "Jeannie's not happy in her mind about that Italian girl. What Italian girl? Why, the Italian girl that writes letters to little Thorpe."

"I think it's all right. You see, any other supposition makes Bep out such a monstrous liar. Besides, he showed me the MS. of the novel with a blank left for the letter to come in. I read the passage. 'With a cry of despair Wilkinson staggered back to the edge of the precipice. The letter was as follows:' And then comes the space he was going to write it into."

"Well—I suppose it's all right. But Jeannie don't think so. What's to be the diameter of that first mover at Wainwright's new shop—carries twenty-five h.p.—a hundred and sixty revs——"

"Make it a sixteenth too much. But, I say, Bony dear—*please* ask Jeannie to say nothing about the Novel—he wants it to be a great surprise. It's an Otto-Crossley, isn't it?" And we plunged into engineer's details, and forgot the letter.

I went to dinner, in response to Lossie's invitation, early enough to have a game with the children and give a clockwork bear to the Turk. She did not show the prowess of her race, for when the bear was wound up and ran about in search of prey she wept. However, she became reconciled in the end, and took the bear to bed with her.

"You are so good with the children, Joe," said Lossie, when I came down at six-thirty o'clock very much towzled and well splashed, for we had finished up with a bathing scene. The bear was not allowed in the bath, but was put on the shelf, too high for us to reach till we were quite dry and had said our prayers. We said them too quick in consequence.

As I descended to rejoin Lossie I saw Beppino coming up the long flight of steps to the street door. He let himself in with his latch-key, and was going straight upstairs when I ran out and intercepted him. He was in an awful hurry—had to be at Park Lane by eight—was it anything particular? No—it wasn't, it was only a letter from his Florentine correspondent, Annunciatina what's-her-name. Catch hold! And he caught hold and went upstairs. But I thought the way in which he said, "Ha—who—ho! Whose handwriting's that—Lossie's?"

had a sound of misgiving. I ascribed it to a fear that she might prosecute enquiry, and find out about the precious Novel. So I resolved to say nothing to her. She asked no questions about why I wanted to catch Beppino, and indeed we had no further conversation, for the sound of a Turk howling was heard, and she rushed upstairs to the rescue. I heard after that the bear had tumbled out of the Turk's bed, and she had awakened and found herself alone, like Psyche.

After a very pleasant evening I started for home with Professor Absalom. But as another storm was threatening I said good-bye to him and walked home quickly. As I crossed over the old bridge the first big warm drops of the coming torrent were spotting the pavement and drying up rapidly. They would not, soon. On arriving at Bony's house I saw a light in his smoking-room window and was just thinking should I go in, when I heard Jeannie's voice calling out "Corner house." The cab, which had overshot its mark, had first to be convinced, then to surrender the point reluctantly, then to turn round deliberately and come back. "Just come from Circus-Road," said she, as I helped her out. "I shall catch it from Bobby for being so late. Yes—I know half-a-crown's enough. Never mind." The hansom evidently preferred the three shillings. Jeannie turned round to me instead of making straight for the door. "That's perfectly ridiculous about Wilkinson," said she.

"What's ridiculous?"

"About Wilkinson and the precipice. Who ever reads letters on the edge of precipices?"

I felt I hadn't a strong case to meet the question flashed at me by such a beautiful face under a gas-lamp in the street with a big storm pending. So I reserved my defence until Bony opened the door. "Ho—raining?" said he. "You'd better run, Joe. It's going to be a deluge." But Jeannie was not going to have her point spoiled. "You agreed, Bobby, you know!"

"Agreed about what?"

"About Wilkinson and the precipice."

"Come along in—don't stand outside. Who's Wilkinson? Oh—I know! Yes, it was rum."

"But it was all written in with the rest of the manuscript," I said. "And a blank left for the letter to come in. And he spoke to me about it of his own accord—almost immediately——"

"How immediately was it?"

"Oh—next day—the day after——"

"Time enough to write a few words in. I don't believe a word of it, Mr. Vance." She always called me Mr. Vance, and I called her Mrs. Mac, for short. We had never Jeannie'd and Joe'd, but I don't exactly know why.

"But, my dear Mrs. Mac," I exclaimed, indignantly, "you are making Beppino out such an awful character!"

"When it's women, some men are!" quoth Jeannie, enigmatically, but none the less clearly.

"Here's the rain, Joe—cut along! Good-night!" Thus Bony; and I called out good-night, and ran for it. And as I closed my own street door and shut the deluge out, I repeated to myself that when it was women some men were. I could not help seeing that in this case it probably was women, and possibly Beppino was. However, I took the next opportunity of impressing on Jeannie that I wished her to say nothing to Lossie of the Novel, about which, by the way, my incredulity grew greater the more I thought about it.

CHAPTER XLVIII

BEPPINO'S ILLNESS. LOSSIE STARTS FOR AVIGNON. A DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR'S FUNERAL. JOE MEETS NEWS OF YET ANOTHER DEATH ON HIS RETURN TO CHELSEA. HE HAS THROWN AWAY GOOD GRIEF ON BEPPINO. WHY DID BEPPINO WANT HIS CHILD CALLED CRISTOFORO?

BEPPINO and his wife left for Avignon a day or two after the wedding. They did not, however, go straight there, because of the heat. I forget where they spent the six weeks or so before they got there. They then took so to the place that they wrote they might very likely remain till Christmas. They were quite at liberty to do what they liked and to go where they pleased. No young couple could have had less reason to anticipate a cloud in the clear horizon of their happiness. Youth, health, wealth, beauty, and fame—at any rate, as far as their own estimate went—what could be asked for more? But all these were as nothing; and the little cloud that was to blacken the whole vault of their heaven was there, invisible and confident.

Would it have been so, I wonder, if they had gone elsewhere? Possibly. Also, possibly, the blow might have come a few weeks earlier, and poor Sibyl's widowhood might have been unalleviated by what I think turned out in her case a substantial happiness. I know there are those who say that it is better that no memorial should remain of such a calamity as hers; that oblivion should be encouraged to the utmost, and the young survivor left to build up a new life on the ruins of the past. I thought hers the more fortunate lot of the two. Her baby—a son—was born about eight months after his father's death. Lossie was with her more or less throughout—from the moment when she started for Avignon on receiving the news of her brother's illness to the time after the baby's birth, when its mother, terrified at first, had passed through a stage of reconciliation, to one of rapture. And she—I mean Lossie—thought with me that the child would be a gain to Sibyl in the present, and no obstacle to another marriage later. We were right.

How much do I really recollect of his illness? Not overmuch. I can remember in their honeymoon—or rather moons—many letters coming to Lossie from Sibyl, who had attached herself almost passionately to her—the only case, by-the-bye, I ever knew of an attraction between sisters-in-law. As I was often at Poplar Villa in the evening, I heard more than one of those letters—or choppings from them—read aloud by Lossie. One evening when the general had been detained (I think it was to investigate the misconduct of some young officers who had put an unpopular ensign in a sack) a letter came from Sibyl to Lossie. She read it out to me and Nolly and his wife, who were also there, in the mercilessly unintelligible way people have of reading letters; only giving just as much as they choose, but gloating over the concealed intervals. I noticed on the letter-back as she held it up that there was a postscript, rough written, but augured nothing from it. When she came to it, the cheerful voice that had been reading an account of a delightful expedition to Vaucluse ended abruptly, and was followed by a short "Oh dear" and attentive reading in silence. "Beppino ill," she said. And then, after a moment more reading: "Oh dear—typhoid!—oh no, not typhoid. But what will poor Sibyl do, all alone?"

"Let's have a look," said Nolly, going across and taking the letter from her. And then as he read the postscript Lossie said, "I shall go straight off to them at once—there's a continental Bradshaw in the house," and rang the bell for the servant. "Oh no," said Nolly, handing me the letter, "he'll be all right! You mustn't think of going, Lossie! It would be too absurd." And I read it too, and joined chorus to the same effect. Lossie reflected for a few seconds, and then said:

"Nolly and Joe—you're all wrong. I'm going, that's flat. You'll keep your eye on the children, Joe, when Hugh's away. There he is—now see what he says!" And the General followed up the click of his latch-key, and was made acquainted with facts and given the postscript to read. He looked it through and then read aloud:

"'Dr. Crozât won't give an opinion about what it is—hopes not typhoid—temperature four degrees above normal.' Well, I should say we needn't get in a fright about that—at least not until it's certain it *is* typhoid. Typhoid takes its time. No, Loss—you mustn't think of rushing away on the strength of this. Wait a day or two!"

"My dear—if I don't go I shall be miserable—think of that inexperienced girl all by herself. It's only a two days' journey. And think what a lot of typhoid I saw that time at Hyderabad——"

"But, Lossie dear, he'll be nursed all right. French doctors are no fools. And why should *you* go? Let Joe—he'll go—won't you, Joe?"

"In an hour—catch the night boat at Dover, and go straight through." I jumped at it.

"Now, Hughie darling, are you in your senses? It isn't only nursing that's wanted. It's poor Sibyl, and keeping her spirits up, and forcing her to go to bed and rest, and all that sort of thing. Joe's a dear boy, but *is* he the proper person?" We were obliged to consider this view, at least.

"Then Joe must go with you," said the General. But Lossie trampled on this suggestion so vigorously that we had to surrender. "Yes—I rang," said Lossie to the servant. "Look in the General's dressing-room and bring down the great thick red book—you'll see it somewhere there." And when the continental Bradshaw arrived it was arranged that Lossie, accompanied by Desirée, her French maid, should start early next morning for Avignon. And as the shops wouldn't be opened so early, Nolly and I went out to purchase all the Brand's beef-essence we could requisition from the neighbouring chemists. Nolly was incredulous, and thought it all a fuss about nothing. "Sibyl's been sticking a little glass thing they've got in his mouth," said he. "He'll be all right in a day or two—you see if he isn't."

"I don't know," said I—"but I wish Lossie would have let me go and stayed." I didn't, afterwards; and as it turned out, neither of us went the next morning. For when Nolly and I returned, laden with Brand's Essence, there was the General at the street door in an embroidered dressing-gown Lossie had made him, smoking in the moonlight. "Come along in, boys," said he. "Loss certainly mustn't go to-morrow, nor perhaps at all. I've seen a lot of typhoid. That time Lossie spoke of we had half a regiment down. And we never knew for a week and more whether it was typhoid or not." And we went in and smoked, and the General told us consolatory stories of superhuman rallies against this disorder, which did credit to the vitality of the English Army.

But for all that, in a very few days typhoid was confirmed—very serious case, and so forth. Nothing could keep Lossie back, and the Brand's Essence was travelled on after all. For at that time food was not what it is now, for the railway traveller, in France or elsewhere.

Then followed three weeks of bulletins—either letters or telegrams. It was all the usual thing—the ups and downs—the struggle of nature against fever—the not uncommon "pronounced out of danger" and the inevitable end. Less than four months after the young couple had started, full of life and hope, Lossie came back into an early November fog to tell us that she had left poor Sibyl in charge of her mother at the house in Park Lane. None of us (either of her family or her husband's) had travelled out, both Sibyl and Lossie begging most earnestly that it should be so. Lossie even stipulated that no one should meet them at the station, wishing to get her charge back to her own home before she saw any one.

The funeral was in England; the body being embalmed and brought over at Sibyl's desire. There was a considerable gathering at the grave, showing a literary appreciation of the deceased quite out of proportion to what I thought the value of his works. But I was glad to be in the wrong, as I saw it would be distinctly pleasant both to his poor young widow and Lossie to hear of it as soon as the first period of grief had gone by. Lossie could never understand my coldness about Beppino's achievements. "It's all nonsense, Joe," she would say, "to tell me you're an Engineer, and engineers can't appreciate poetry." And another time when she had been at a soirée of the Royal Society with her husband: "What do you think old Dean Parr Bentley said about you, Joe? Said you were the only undergraduate he ever knew that could appreciate Pindar, and that a man who could take in Pindar could assimilate everything Greek! There! And then you say you're an Engineer, and don't understand Poetry." I replied that undergraduates were born of a low order of intelligence, and changed the subject. For I was always afraid of catechism from Lossie as to why I was callous towards Beppino. She was not surprised at Nolly, who was his brother by blood, so it was natural! Cain would have had a low opinion of any contributions of Abel's to the daily Press, and *vice versa*. This, however, was some time before Beppino's death. Now that he was gone it gave me pleasure to look forward to repeating to Lossie the things said to me at the funeral by men really qualified to form a judgment.

I went straight home to Chelsea after the funeral, knowing I should not find Lossie at Poplar Villa. Poor Sibyl clung to her and could hardly bear to be parted from her. So she had promised to stay with her all that day. It was a terrible day of driving sleet and ready-made snow sludge, thawing underfoot as it fell; a day to be remembered even by those who had not plodded through it to a new-made grave, over turf that combined all the worst qualities of ice and poultice. I was glad of the shelter even of my own lonely house. Would any one, I wonder, believe me if I told them the thought that hovered in my mind as I dwelt sadly on the poor young widow in her loneliness? It was not a well-defined thought—more a speculation of what it would have been had I thought it. It would have been very like "*she* has only lost Beppino, while I——" I refused to think it, and to help me against it picked up the letters that awaited me and took them up to Janey's writing-table to read, telling Pips to open the shutters in front in token of leave to survivors to forget the departed if so disposed.

What on earth was this huge black border I had to light the gas to see? Who can be writing to me from Florence to tell of a death? For that is the only meaning of a border as wide as one-third of the envelope. It was directed to the Illmo: Signore, Signor Giuseppe Vance, Cheyne Row, Chelsea, Inghilterra, written legibly, but with an appearance of having been copied by the writer. Did you ever see your own handwriting copied by another person?—it has an odd familiarity and one cannot guess why—but one sees there is something wrong. I opened the letter, and read:

"FIESOLE.

"GENTILISSIMO SIGNOR VANCE,

"Mese addietro Le scrissi una lettera, indirizzandola come ha detto Lei, a Ryder and Abbott, Tichborne Street 122, London, Inghilterra; e non avendo avuto alcuna risposta, dubito che Ella non si trovi più là, o forse che la lettera sia andata smarrita; però vengo a replicare il suo contenuto.

"Devo dare con animo straziato la tristissima notizia della morte della mia compianta cugina, che spirava serenamente il di 16 Ottobre, munita dei conforti religiosi, tre settimane dopo la nascita d' un maschio bellissimo, avendo una somiglianza alla Sua grata persona, tanto che siamo rimasti tutti stupefatti. Fino all' agonia ha dato speranze il Signor Dottore: ma che vuole?—Ogni mezzo e stato provato, ed ogni rimedio: inutile tutto! Il bambino sta discretamente di salute; e speriamo che continui a migliorare. Anche noi siamo discretamente di salute, ma tutti profondamente commossi per la perdita della nostra carissima defunta.

"Tutti partecipiamo al suo immenso dolore, tanto più che Ella sia stato così crudelmente impedito dal ritornare alla sua amatissima moglie.

"Gradisca, Signore, il rispettoso saluto della sua devotissima Faustina Vespucci, Via della Carrozza, No. 13, Ottobre . . , '74."

The day was illegible in the date—but it was October clear enough.

Then followed a postscript.

"Avendo paura che anche questa non giunga a Lei, ho pensato di spedire una duplicazione così, indirizzandola al padrone dell' Albergo di Milano di cui rammento il nome sulla sua valigia, sperando che per caso lui avrebbe altro indirizzo.

"La ringrazio ancora per il denaro. Come ho già scritto è arrivato in buon tempo, ma per far tutto in ordine e riguardevolmente le spese montano su, e siamo stati costretti a ricorrere al buon cuore del Padre facendoci imprestare la somma di duegento lire, ma siamo sempre per via di servircene col risparmio." *

Along a blank margin was written "Al desiderio della Signora, fu battezzato il bambino Cristoforo Vance. Diceva anche il Signore lo voleva così." I did not make this out in my first reading.

I don't think I ever had a more horrible sensation in my life than the clash between the softened feelings about Beppino that I had brought from his grave, and the shock this letter gave me. Not that I realized its contents properly at first. I only saw that there had been some foul play, and that it was connected with the former letter addressed to me, and meant for Beppino. Jeannie Macallister's rapid insight into an aspect of the last letter which I had missed had shaken my faith in Beppino's explana-

---

* [A month ago I wrote you a letter directed as you told me to Ryder and Abbott, Tichborne St., and having had no answer, I am in doubt if you are still there, or perhaps the letter may have got lost. I therefore write this to repeat its contents.

I have to give you with acute grief the most sad announcement of the death of my beloved cousin, who breathed her last tranquilly on Oct. 16, fortified by the consolations of religion, three weeks after the birth of a most beautiful boy, so closely resembling yourself as to astonish all of us. The Doctor held out hopes up to the last moment, but what would you ?—every means had been tried and every remedy—all in vain! The child is going on well and we hope will continue to improve. For ourselves we are well enough as to health, but in the deepest grief for the loss of our most beloved departed.

We all join in sympathy for your heavy loss, all the heavier that you have been so cruelly prevented from returning to your beloved wife.

Accept, Signore, the respectful salutations of your most devoted, etc.

P. S. Being afraid this also may fail to reach you, I have thought best to send it in duplicate, directing to the padrone of the Hotel at Milan, the name of whom I recollect on your luggage, in the hope that he will have another address.

Thank you again for the money. As I have already written, it arrived in good time, but to do all in order and with due respect the expenses have run up, and I have been obliged to have recourse to the kindness of the Padre, and get him to lend me two hundred francs. But we have always been as economical as possible.

At the wish of the Signora the baby was christened Cristoforo Vancè. She said the Signore had wished this also.]

tion, and in my own judgment. But I had forgotten this in the incident of the funeral. I remembered it now, and I simply felt sick to think what it was that was on the edge of elucidation. I saw the sort of thing, not the details.

I got at them gradually. First it was clear that this letter had been forwarded by the hall-porter at the Milan Hotel, where my address, written by myself, had evidently been kept; also that a correspondence had been going on with Beppino at Poplar Villa, and that the last Italian letter had reached him a month nearly before this one was posted. How long had this one been coming? About ten days from date of writing—the postmarks were, like postmarks, illegible. Then forty days ago this poor lady, whoever or whatever she was—for really I hardly dared to think of that part of the matter—had been lying dead at Fiesole, and Beppino had either forgotten all about her in his honeymoon raptures, or letters had miscarried. Probably the latter. One thing was clear, pending explanation, that there was a seven-weeks-old baby in charge of some not very near relation—that was plain from the "rispettoso saluto"—and that there was a want of money. I must ease my mind about that baby, even at the cost of a little risk. I immediately wrote a letter to Faustina Vespucci, saying that I was not the person for whom the letter was intended, but that I believed I knew who *was* meant, and would take upon myself to forward a little *danaro*, as I felt certain I should be repaid. I wrote a cheque for twenty pounds, and when I had enveloped it and directed it felt as if I had really been of some use. It was too late for the foreign post now—but it might as well be posted. I should feel as if the poor people had got twenty pounds. I would post it as I went to tea at Bony's, at the baker's at the corner of Danvers Street. Meanwhile I should have time to think more over this letter.

A person may be moderately familiar with Italian and yet may easily make mistakes in a first perusal of a letter. The practice of addressing people as *she* is one that requires time to become acceptable to an Englishman. The first impression I had was that Beppino had been making love to some married lady and that *she* was intended by some at least of the *ella's* and *lei's* that puzzled me. She had had a male baby, and it had a startling likeness to her *grata persona*—was very like its mother, in fact. But stop a bit. That wouldn't do! Why on earth should Beppino be sending money out to—yes! evidently to some nurse, or housekeeper, or perhaps well-disposed friends—on account of either this baby or its mother? Then how about his being so cruelly prevented from returning to his beloved wife? I had read it wrong, and must go through it more carefully.

Slowly—slowly—it dawned upon me. Beppino was actually married to this Italian girl—or at least she believed him her husband—at the very time when he was arranging his marriage with Sibyl Fuller Perceval in England. And this ill-starred little *maschio* was near his entry on the scene when his father was uttering his new lies to a fresh victim. For if the first was his victim by reason of his desertion, the second was even more so in view of his deliberate mendacity.

Had I known then what I have since learned about Italian marriage-law, I should have understood that no bigamy was necessarily involved in Beppino's action. I should have known what admirable facilities it gives to enterprise of this sort, and how the Church-service of espousal is a mere farce unless there is also a secular one; and that possibly Beppino was only half as bad as he seemed, having played the part of an incarnate devil to one girl only instead of two. For even if the maudlin iniquities of the laws Men make, and Women have no voice in, had backed him up in his treachery to this Italian, the knowledge that she was tied to an unclean creature would have broken (most likely) the heart that had the precious legal right to call him husband. But at that time I knew nothing of this achievement of Themis, and took for granted that the girl was really his wife according to Italian Law.

There was another thing I took for granted, and it never crossed my mind to question it until I had quite exhausted conjecture as to how the little miscreant had contrived to maintain his pretexts about his delayed return to his wife. On that point I was destined to remain in the dark. The thing I swallowed whole without protest was the use of my own name, and its bestowal on the lady. I conceived of it simply as part of the accident of the ascription of my name to Beppino and his original acquiescence in it as a kind of joke. Such a misconception might go great lengths in Tuscany; the natives regarding *forestieri* as quite irresponsible, and very likely wrong about their own names; while the latter would consider them in return fascinating and clever, but children for all that! I suppose if I had been less tired with the funeral, and shocked with the main fact of the letter, I should have seen the whole bearing of the case better. As it was I would go and get Jeannie to give me tea, and say nothing to any one about it till I had had time to collect myself. I didn't even post the twenty pounds as I had intended, stopping short just as I was letter-boxing it. It would go just as soon posted to-morrow.

I was really glad to forget the whole thing; although I knew I was doing so artificially, and that I should have to let it come back. I was much helped by hearing a storm of babies rush into the passage in response to my knock, and say it knew it was mine. Jeannie had five of these articles, and it was great joy to carry the two smallest and be propelled by Archie Stephenson and Flix into light and warmth and chatter of many tongues and Jeannie looking splendid, and any amount of tea preparations.

"Oh dear!" said she, "I've been thinking of you all day. Such an awful day. Flixie and Posset, my dears, your uncle Joe's tired and you must let him off easy." I encouraged these two to pay no attention to their mother, and they made no concession. But a call came in connection with tea supplies which I was glad of. Parenthetically, Jeannie's soft silvery Scotch accent was always there, though I can't spell it. If you like to spell "dears" with a *u* and sound the *r*, I see no objection.

Madame Schmidt, my old pianist friend, was there. She had got a foothold in Bony's family as an instructor not only in music, but in the other arts, and Science and Literature, and so forth. I knew a man once who undertook to teach Sanskrit, of which he knew nothing. "I learned," said he, "as much before breakfast as I could teach between ten and twelve. And I allowed no questions to be asked." I believe the Frau did exactly the same with the little Macallisters. I was glad to see her, for her presence (as the Press would say nowadays) spelt Beethoven. However, the spelling was not going to become speech on a piano she could only play for the children on. We must go round to my house if there was to be any Beethoven: the Frau was inflexible. So I sent instructions to Pips to have coffee ready, and I stayed on to dinner, and we all went round to my house directly after, "indigestically, but never mind!" said Jeannie. And then we had coffee, and simply wallowed in the Pathétique and the Moonlight and the Waldstein, and I had my special movement twice over.

I had need of it, so horrible was the memory I had to slip back to. I said good-night to Jeannie and Bony and Frau Schmidt, with the phrases of the Waldstein still ringing triumphantly through every fibre of my senses. We had spoken less, and less freely, of the departed than we should have done had the letter incident not occurred. Had there been no Wilkinson and no precipiece, Jeannie would have been almost sure to join in the conversation more easily, whatever she really thought. As it was, she spoke very little of the funeral, and in response to my good-night only bade me, "Good-night, Mr. Vance, and now do go and have a real good night's rest, for you look half-dead." Her husband had referred to the funeral.

However, as old Anne at Poplar Villa used to say, "Half-dead never filled the churchyard." It (or he) did not even send me off into a sound sleep. For just as I was going off, I was dragged awake again by a thought. How, if Beppino had actually availed himself of the name-confusion to betray this girl, and lure her into a marriage which he could disclaim.

As soon as I was fully awake, I saw he could not have done this, unless indeed Italian and English wedding-law were different. But it made me very feverish and uncomfortable, and I was very sorry for myself for not having got to sleep that time. Never mind, I would try again. And I had just got comfortably settled, with the clothes tucked round behind, and the pillow pulled a little down, when a new disturbing idea came. What was the name the child had been called? I had not read it very clearly. I dismantled all my comfort without remorse, and, jumping up, lit the candle beside my bed. I got the letter from my pocket as quick as I could, and got back to bed again and read it over.

Where was it? Here along the blank margin of the first page: "Fu battezzato Cristoforo Vancè—anche il Signore lo voleva così." Now what did that mean?

Christopher Vance—my Father's name! Why, if I had had a boy myself, that is what I should have called him. Was it conceivable that—but perhaps I was feverish. I would put the letter away till to-morrow. I turned in again, and this time I went to sleep, and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XLIX

JOE SUBSIDIZES CRISTOFORO. HOW HE TOOK GENERAL DESPREZ INTO HIS CONFIDENCE. THE BRAZILIAN SCHEME. ANOTHER FLORENTINE LETTER. HOW JOE RESOLVED TO GO OUT AND SEE THAT CRISTOFORO WAS PROPERLY NOURISHED.

To go through all the ups and downs this Italian letter caused me would be to record the vacillations of three weeks. I did not at first see my way to taking any one into my confidence. Nor did I post my cheque next day, as I had intended. But I sent the money out in bank notes with a letter which I dictated to one of my clerks at the works, filling in the Italian name and the address myself. It merely said twenty pounds was enclosed and please acknowledge to Mr. Vance. Another letter would follow. This gave me time to think it over.

As soon as I could make up my mind what had actually happened, I would take Hugh Desprez into my confidence. I cannot describe the power he had of inspiring trust in himself. I always felt and thought of him as a great superior strength, and wondered at Lossie's intrepidity with him and his complete acquiescence in her influence. She once said to me, "If Hugh were angry with me I think I should die. I have seen him angry, and you have no idea what it was. Some of the men had ill-treated a native woman—I don't like to think of it"—and Lossie turned pale, and I changed the topic.

The question (so it seemed to me) that I had to answer was: Secrecy, or no secrecy? I wanted secrecy, but I could not be sure it was right. If the General consented to secrecy, it could not be wrong! Nothing he consented to could be—it was a foregone conclusion.

At the end of the three weeks of vacillation I had decided that what had actually happened was this: After leaving me at Milan, Beppino had fallen in love—or what he called love—with an Italian girl, and finding he would have to marry her or give up the point, had chosen the former alternative. Whether he believed at the time that the use of my name would obtain the support of Authority for his treachery, I could not decide.

I was not even sure that he had not protested against its use, and thereby created a suspicion that he wished to substitute a false Thorpé for a true Vancè. He may even have intended on his return to England to allow Sibyl to lapse and to acknowledge the Italian. He would have been a scurvy beast according to my high-flown ideas had he done so; but not so bad, as the world goes! The tendency of my speculations was towards excuse-mongering. I would make the best case I could to lay before the General. As for his use of my name as a wrong to myself, I did not trouble much. What could it matter? What could anything matter? And suppose he *had* tried to impute an Italian baby to me, and to foster the idea by giving it my Father's name, was it a thing to be resented by a man who (so long as he could account to himself for his own actions) did not care much what folk thought about him? Did I not remember how that day in the Ticino valley I longed to carry off Idomeneo Pellegrini from his delicious mud-pie, and appropriate him, and how I even felt sorry to wash off the compact little hand-print he had so kindly mpressed on my forehead. Oh no! It was no wrong to be resented—a scheme to make me the possessor of an Idomeneo without crime or treachery on my part. For anything I knew this ittle character, at present half-mummified, and only allowed chrysalis-exercise for its legs, might turn out as succulent at three as Idomeneo. I shut my eyes and endeavoured to picture to myself his clenched fists, trying to clear away an obstructive universe; his errific voice insisting on a bottle, and his immediate preoccupaion on receiving it. No! I wasn't going to be very angry about hat part of the business. I would send the little party some more ash to go on with in case he should be running short.

I made up my mind then that I would speak to the General s soon as an opportunity offered. We always smoked in the Library, and my chance came one evening in December, when had dined alone with him and Lossie; and she, being tired, ad announced that she should go to bed early. So we deferred igars altogether till she went, and then adjourned to the Library or good. After we had smoked a little I spoke.

"I say, General, I want to put a case to you. Suppose a priate soldier was to come to you and say he had something in is mind—something affecting the welfare of the regiment—and ay he couldn't tell it unless you promised secrecy—what would ou say?"

The General considered for a few seconds—a very few—and en said:

"I should say I couldn't make a promise in the dark—he must either trust me in full, or carry his information elsewhere. I would promise to do my best by him if he liked to confide in me. Only, he would have to confide outright!"

We sat puffing out clouds in silence for a few minutes. Then he looked at me, and said interrogatively, "Terms accepted, Joe?"

"Terms accepted," I replied. "You'll have to listen to a long story, General." And I told him straight through without reserve the whole story as I have written it. I also told him what I knew of Beppino's previous life—the affair of Thornberry's wife, and also I am sorry to say of one or two analogous events that had come to my knowledge which I have not recorded here. When I had ended, the General remarked that he was not a very good Italian scholar, but he might as well see the letter. I handed it to him.

"Of course the chief thing is Lossie," said he. "We can't have her heart broken over this. Also that poor little widow-lady."

"Of course," I repeated after him, "the chief thing is Lossie." And I felt that he had thrown in poor Sibyl in a rather perfunctory way. But I was worse, and did not include her at all. Neither he nor I then knew that a child was expected. Had we done so we should have seen at once how it would complicate the position. Lossie may have known; but it was early days to talk of such matters, and nothing had reached me or the General. He opened the letter, and translated to himself, referring to me once or twice for an interpretation.

"What's 'vengo a replicare'? I come to reply?—oh, I see, duplicate its contents. And what's 'siamo rimasti stupefatti'?"

"They have remained surprised. That is, they were astonished at the likeness—the *somiglianza*——"

"To its mother?"

"No—to Beppino. His *grata persona* is himself."

"The bambino stands discreetly. It's too young. It can't stand at all."

"It's only a way of saying it's doing very well on the whole."

"I suppose the poor girl's name was Gradisca? Here it is—'sua amatissima moglie Gradisca.'"

"Oh no! It's only a way they have of winding up a letter. Heaven only knows what it means!"

"Why can't they write plain English?" However, the General got through the rest of the letter, and even admitted that having recourse to the good heart of the Padre was not a bad expression—for foreigners. In spite of all his long residence in India, he had a John Bull citadel in his innermost heart.

"We must send them some money, Joe," said he, at once taking the same point as myself first. "But most likely you've done that?" I admitted that I had, and added that possibly I had sent more than was wise.

"You see, General," I said, "I haven't consulted any one, and whenever I felt anxious about that baby I relieved my mind by posting Bank of England notes to it. It's quite a little Crœsus by now. But tell me, how does the whole thing strike you?"

"Well—I'm too old to be surprised at anything of this sort. I never remain stupefied, as our friend says, about anything with a woman in it. Besides, I took Beppino's measure long ago. I never knew any of these stories you have told me, but of course I could give him his class after all the young officers I have known. Lossie thought of him as of an innocent young boy, a child. She would be horribly cut up if she knew the truth."

"*I* shan't tell her. But didn't Bep sometimes strike you as being like a child, in some respects?"

"Yes, he did. But then the first thing that struck me—when I saw him first—about fourteen he was, I think—was that his intellect was so much older than himself. Now I always thought latterly that his body had got older than his mind, and run away with him, as it were. However, it's no use speculating. He wasn't good—we must leave him to other Judgment than ours. We have to think what's to be done now. Let's run through the letter again—well, look here! here we are at the first go-off! How long did this letter take to reach you? I can't make out the date."

"Probably a week. But here's the envelope——"

"It's no good looking at postmarks. But it would be a week, more or less. And the writer had written a month before. And you got this the day of the funeral. The letter despatched a month before the funeral may be still lying at this address given in the letter. Nothing was forwarded to Avignon during his illness."

"How do we know? He may have told them to direct Poste Restante, Avignon?" And we went on discussing the numerous possibilities, but ended by deciding that it would be just as well to apply at Ryder and Abbott's and claim any letter we should find.

"Should we be justified in doing so?" said I.

"Legally yes, because I am his executor," replied the General. I had forgotten this fact. Beppino had made a will at Lossie's instigation, and had made Hugh sole executor. "As to the moral aspect of the case," continued he, "I think I may go to that responsibility."

"As to claiming it," said I. "But how about reading it when we've got it?"

"Suppose we think it over," answered he. And as he said nothing more on this point, I left the matter alone, and we talked, I think, of a raid the children had made on their father's photographic chemicals—and some uncertainty there had been as to whether the Turk had sampled the Cyanide.

This was on Thursday. Next day I dined with some friends to meet some men who had a big work in hand for Brazil, and were good enough to think I should be of service to them. The Saturday evening I spent as usual with Mr. Spencer at Hampstead. I can remember the blank that came over his poor old face when I told him about the Brazilian mines, and the railway that was to "open up" a country about the size of Austria. "Joe!—Joe!" said he, "you'll go away to South America and we shall never see you again." I answered, "Never fear, Padrone"—but felt rather hypocritical about it. For I had already been thinking to myself how few ties I should have if Lossie and her husband went to live in Italy, as they often talked of doing, and Bony's father, who was ailing, should die and leave him heir to his estates in Perthshire. Bony's elder brother, Colonel Macallister, received a charge of shot in one eye at a shooting-party, at the age of thirty-five, and had lost a life that seemed to enjoy deer-stalking and grouse-shooting, billiards and picquet, a funny play and a good dinner, impartially and equally, without any distinction. He was a great loss to his friends, and when he died a bachelor Bony was left sole heir to some very broad acres. The latter liked his profession well enough, but a big factory in London had no attractions that would compete with a little kingdom in the Perthshire Highlands. He would go, and then I really should hardly have a soul of the old lot to speak to. There would be Nolly, certainly; but he and I had never been close enough not to slip asunder and yet remain the best of friends whenever we met. There is very little juice in reciprocity of that sort.

So when my father-in-law said to me, "We shall never see you again," the thought that crossed my mind was that "I" might have done as well as "We." He would be the only human tie with any strength in it in London, if all went as I foresaw. I replied to him that if I did go it would only be for a spell, and

I wasn't going to desert him. I could not say to him that I never really felt happy with him, because I could not talk freely of Janey. When I referred to her he sighed, "Ah dear—ah dear," and seldom spoke in reply. I no more dared speak of her as I thought, as of a living something in a time I had no conception of and a space my eyes were closed on, than if he had been Violet Towerstairs.

When I next day saw Hugh, on the Sunday at Poplar Villa, he and Lossie were surrounded by young officers; a small fraction, said he, of a train of worshippers whom Lossie always had in hand in India. "You'll see," said he, "that the one she speaks to will brighten up, and all the others will look dejected." Which happened to the letter, all the evening. Such a crew of dear boys, and all for what? The only survivor of the party (when I began to write these annotations) was killed the other day. I saw his name in the list a week ago. I had to think of Dr. Thorpe and his saying.

When the last laugh had died away and the last good-night been said—and with one at least it was a case of *moriturus te salutat,* for we heard of his death a month later—the General and I turned into the Library again for a little chat, and Lossie vanished upstairs.

"What do you think now," I asked, "about going to claim the letter—or letters?"

"I've got them here somewhere," said he. "There are two. Got them next morning. Here they are;" and he brought them out of his pocket. I still felt uneasy about opening them, and said so.

"But your scruples won't go the length of collaring them from me?" And he settled the matter by opening one forthwith.

I have not this letter here, as the General kept it, and probably destroyed it after Beppino's affairs were wound up. It was in the handwriting of the first letter (signed Annunciatina), which Beppino had given the doubtful explanation of, and the substance was that Annunciatina Vancè was looking forward with rapture to the promised return of her darling husband. It was dated the 25th of September, after the birth of the baby, which had been christened Cristoforo, as his father had wished. It was carino ma carino—veramente un angiolo di bellezza, e tanto somigliante al mio tesoro. There was only one macchia on the writer's pienezza di gioia, this "crudele ritardimento del ritorno—ah come desiderato!—del mio bramatissimo marito." The letter threw some light on the excuses for this delay, as the writer dwelt on the cruelty of the military laws which dragged the husband from the wife and the son from the mother to serve in the army, even when little fitted by nature for such service. Beppino had evidently made representations in this sense. The letter thanked him for his enclosures of denaro sempre ben avanzato, and we would badare that it should be ben risparmiato. There were not tanti quattrini in these days! Then followed more expressions of rapturous affection; but as I cannot recall the Italian phrases, this description of the remainder of the letter is enough. The other letter was the duplicate of the one I had received.*

"*His* military service," said the General. "The little miscreant. I know, Joe! *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* But there's a limit."

"I wasn't going to defend him," said I. "I was only going to ask you where you found the letters?"

"It was his tailor's—I really felt as if they were a sort of accomplices. But of course they were as innocent as this poor baby. They had not even heard of Beppino's death—which was a little odd. I suppose they were very busy with their winter orders. He had told them to forward all Mr. Giuseppe Vance's letters that came there to the Hotel at Avignon, as well as letters to himself, but only till the end of October, when he expected to return to London. Several had come for Mr. Giuseppe Vance, but none for Mr. Thorpe. All had been forwarded as directed but these two, of which the first arrived October 31. Our Mr. Abbott, who knew about these letters, was away at the time, and only came back November 3d; and we then thought it best not to forward. We hoped we had done rightly, and I said yes."

What a revelation of duplicity and lies! How did the little traitor, under the very eyes of his new-made bride, contrive to receive and answer these forwarded letters? There must have been some awaiting him at the hotel when he arrived. "Surely Sibyl would have seen them?" I said.

"Why should she not?" said the General. "Remember they were not directed to him."

"But Mrs. Beppino knows my name well enough, and would be sure to ask questions."

"My dear boy, the letter wasn't directed to you either. Sibyl wouldn't know Giuseppe Vancè from Adam."

"But she would have seen Beppino take the letters."

---

* Mr. Vance, writing for an imaginary reader, chooses to imagine, among other things, that this reader understands Italian! We have done our best, by translation and omission, to remove this obstacle from the path of the ordinary reader, but have thought it would damage the character of the work to cancel or alter the whole. The reader must skip.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

"Yes, if he had grabbed at them in her presence. But, you see, he was no fool. Probably he waited till she was out of the way and then told the hotel man he would give them to Mr. Vance at another Hotel. There could be no difficulty five francs wouldn't cover."

And so we went on discussing the ins and outs and difficulties of the matter; and I did not feel then, and never have felt, clear about how it was manipulated so as to avoid detection and exposure. But Hugh's head was cooler than mine and I accepted his view, which was that Beppino's crime was now a thing of the past, the victim being dead as well as himself. He took for granted that the girl had been deceived by some form of bogus marriage—perhaps only to satisfy scruples. "You see," said he, "to suppose it otherwise would void his marriage with Sibyl. He seems to have been villain enough for anything. But villains respect property who would treat women as mere drugs in the market. Think of the darling Money involved. Beppino was not rich enough to be indifferent to Sibyl's money—nor pastoral enough!"

I assented to this then. Afterwards I saw reason to doubt it. But I now see Hugh was right. He knew more than I did of the power of the one thing sacred, the motive that outlives and supersedes all others. If in what followed after I had allowed enough for the force of gold, many things in my life might have gone otherwise.

"What shall we do now?" said I, when we began to feel we could get no further light on the subject by talking it over. "Suppose I go over and see after this poor little card. I hope to goodness he'll get proper sustenance." The General could not help smiling. "My dear Joe Vance," he said, "what a regular old Mrs. Gamp you are!"

"Lossie always says so!" said I. "But I'm serious. I shall have to go to Milan in the course of the spring. I might just as well go now. I can send cash, and instructions to Faustina Vespucci, adhering to my description of myself, and to Beppino's death. I shan't have to answer any questions as long as I produce cash."

"You'll let me stand Sam," said Hugh.

"No—I won't," said I.

CHAPTER L

JOE GOES TO FIESOLE. AND HEARS ALL ABOUT BEPPINO'S WILD OAT. HE GETS HIS LETTERS, AND ADOPTS HIS BABY. HIS MIXED TALE TO LOSSIE. HE IS WALKING ON A TIGHT-ROPE, BUT FOR LOSSIE'S SAKE.

It was well on in January before I was able to run out (as I called it) to Milan. I went by the Mont Cénis—rather relieved to escape the route by which Beppino and I had travelled out. I should have found Idomeneo Pellegrini blue, and his mud-pie frozen. The journey through the mountain this time was an experience of sitting in a stuffy railway carriage, and wrangling with an American family about opening windows. I remember it now as an instance of Man's inconsequent nature that, after I had mentioned to the Paterfamilias that I should probably go to America in the autumn, the family allowed me to have the window two inches open at long intervals.

I was much too curious about Cristoforo Vancè to get through my Milan business before seeing him; so I went to Florence first and took a vehicle next day to Fiesole.

I started from Maria Novella in a thick fog, which with a sufficient supply of coal smoke would have given the Hotel Minerva an experience of London. As the road rose towards San Domenico the fog lightened, and, when we arrived there it was clear enough to see the bells swing in the church-tower as well as hear them. Then we started on the serious climb, and I proposed that I should walk to spare the horse. But the driver said, "Che, che! Non si confonda! Si accommodi! Si accommodi!" and really got quite excited about it. The horse, which of course he called a havallo, was equal to any emergency: "Fara bene, lo garantisco io!" But he got down and walked himself at the very stiff bit at the top, and I think it was good for him, as his clothes were really filled out too tight to be reasonable. By the time we got to the Medici villa just below this, we were in dazzling sunshine, and spread over the whole valley of the Arno was a strange fog sea, looking like a dead level plain basking in the light, and from the centre of it shot up the towers of Florence—the Campanile and the Signoria—and the colossal dome that could take St. Paul's inside with only small accommodation. The sun was quite warm now towards mezzogiorno, and the population of vendors of roba di paglia were enjoying it and I suppose pitying the choked and shivering Florentines below. They were indignant with me for not wanting straw workboxes and screens.

I found that the Via della Carrozza was a strada running from the Piazza (where the Electric Trams stop now) along the face of the hill where the stone quarries are.

It happened that it was a rather bad road, and the house some distance off; however, there was a short cut. So I left my fat driver behind in spite of his protestations about the powers of his havallo, and went on foot. I found the *scorciatoio*, or short cut, and then the house, and then its primo piano. And there a lassie who opened the door, said yes, this was where the Signora Vancè had lived, and if I would passare she would tell the Signorina Faustina. But the Signora Vancè was "morta tre mesi fa"—dead three months ago.

I was fairly put to it to understand the voluble Tuscan of the Signorina Faustina when she came, which was not made more intelligible by the poor woman's overpowering joy at seeing a parente of the povero Signore. Indeed, we had not gone much beyond establishing who I was, and bringing about the production of Master Cristoforo Vancè himself in the arms of an amazing balia, or wet-nurse (who at once set at rest all misgivings about Cristoforo's rations), when the buon Padre appeared—he, as I learned, who had advanced money for the spese. He was a great relief, as he was a very intelligent middle-aged man who spoke distinctly, more like a Roman than a Florentine; and who also knew a few words of English, having passed some of his early life in a fraternity at that well-known English town *Soodongtong;* which I acknowledged provisionally and identified later as Southampton. But these things take time. The earlier part of our interview was also interrupted by the chiasso di quel bambino, who certainly had strong lungs, and seemed to object to everything. He was amiable to me though, and took steps towards tearing my beard out by the roots. He then forgot to let go, and became distrait, and hiccoughed. Then he started the chiasso and was removed. It seemed so funny to me that that little purple-brown thing was really Christopher Vance, and called so after my dear Daddy, although his own father had scarcely a right to appropriate the name.

The story of his parents' marriage, or what the priest and Signorina Faustina, who was a cousin of the bride, told me gradually and disjointedly, may be condensed as follows:

Annunziatina Vespucci was a daughter of a respectable well-to-do contadino of Castel Fiorentino. She had a very fine voice, and her parents, to give her a chance of educating it, placed her with a relative, an aunt, in Florence, at whose house she met Beppino, who used to go there to take Italian lessons from the aunt. Beppino made love to her, and the poor girl, who was barely seventeen, had fallen madly in love with him. Her parents, learning what was going on, had withdrawn her from the aunt's, and forbidden her to have any communication with her lover. I did not then clearly understand, and have never known, what objection they had to him. Probably he crossed some other arrangements they had in view. The result was stolen interviews, and, finally, that Annunziatina left her home suddenly and was married at the parish church of Gualdo Tadino in the January. The Priore gave me his most solemn assurance of his belief that the marriage had been strictly in ordine, and I, being perfectly ignorant of Italian usages, could not question anything he said, nor was I inclined to do so. He admitted that it had seemed to him strange that none of the parenti of the Signore Vancè had turned up—but then, che vuole?—the Signora and Signore seemed all-sufficient to one another. Moreover, I was not to suppose he himself had really seen much of the Signore—he had only done what he could to reassure and console the Signora after his departure. The Signora had seen nothing of her parents, who were incensed against her. But when the Signore was called away in the spring, she wrote to her cousin, the Signorina Faustina, telling her of her condition and that her husband was called away to England on urgent business. She had wished to accompany him, but he had dissuaded her—vedutè le circostanzè.

Whatever Beppino supposed his position to be with respect to poor Annunziatina—whether or not he supposed his false name or some law shuffle would back him up in betraying her—I do not know; but I could see no object in raising doubts of his integrity in minds where none existed. I had the task, always unpleasant, of telling literal truths in such a way as to produce an entirely false impression. The task was all the easier as my audience put any discrepancy down to my faulty Italian, and substituted plausible versions of their own. I told them Beppino had left England in the autumn, none of "us" knowing exactly what his plans were, and had been taken ill at a Hotel at Avignon, and died of typhoid a fortnight after his wife. I felt a horrible liar in speaking of Annunziatina without a hint of a question of her position; and wished for an equivalent of "ma che vuole?" in

English, to escape my own conscience. After I had told them all I could get into bad Italian, subject to the drawbacks under which I spoke, I asked were there no letters from Avignon, and what was the date of the last? Yes, there were many letters, and the last came very shortly before the relapse which ended in Annunziatina's death.

La Faustina, as the Padre called her, produced these letters; but demurred about allowing them to be read, or to go out of her possession. She had not read them, though she had heard some of them as they arrived—was not sure she ought not to destroy them unread. I entreated her not to do so, until I had time to think over the whole thing. I saw I had a difficult position to deal with, but was anxious to get every light possible on the story, and at the same time unwilling to leave this large parcel of letters, signed with my own name, without knowing into whose hands they might pass. I did not like to say destroy them at once. I said I would go away and get lunch, being aware of a table being laid in an adjoining room. But the Faustina begged me to favorire, as the Priore was staying to desinare, and I accepted the invitation.

I did not take a very long time making up my mind about the course to pursue. By the time I had smoked a Trabuco after pranzo (I was glad to find that everything seemed to have been on a most comfortable footing) I had made a resolution. And the result of the proposals it prompted me to make with the Faustina was a treaty to the following effect:

She for her part was to take charge of Cristoforo Vancè and see that he should be copiously, even extravagantly nourished. That his legs should be released from bondage at the very earliest date Tuscan usage would sanction. That she should write to me every week for the present, and should receive by return a remittance to cover expenses and a consideration for herself. That she should also accept as a regalo after all she had done for the poor Signora the mobiglia and sundries the house contained, which indeed I should have been puzzled else to know what to do with. And lastly, that the letters should be handed over to me to give to the Signore's executors in England. These conditions being complied with, I would charge myself with all the responsibilities of a parent towards Cristoforo.

The Faustina hesitated over the letters. Would it be right to give them up?—Remember, she saw me for the first time!—The Padre also considered there should be a clause in the Treaty about Cristoforo's being brought up a Christian, and not a Protestantè, or Free Thinker. I was about to point out that the mother's wish decided this, when I perceived that if I made difficulties, and said the father was of the Chiesa Evangelica, the Faustina would concede the letters in exchange for a concession on my part. So it turned out, and the Treaty with some minor details was ratified. I felt a great story-teller, but then, was I not taking over Cristoforo?

I have made great efforts to remember all I could of this interview, in order that I may recollect, if possible, how large a share in it was taken by the only person then present who lives on into my story. I think I have recalled everything of any importance so far. Let me try and be equally accurate with the remainder.

When the Treaty was, as it were, signed and sealed, and the subject of it, who was taking some refreshment, had been brought in for a final inspection, I prepared to take my leave and go back to my fly-driver. The important parts of the negotiation had been between the Faustina, the Priore, and myself, none other being present. As I exchanged my last words with them, there were present also the balia, to whom Master Christopher was attached as a limpet; and the ragazza who had admitted me to the house, and waited on us at dinner, when our conversation on the main subject had been less specific and concentrated than either before or after. As nearly as I can remember I turned to the Signorina and told her in the best Italian I could command that I intended to fulfil all the responsibilities of a father towards that child, and that although his baptismal name had been chosen without consulting me I was quite content with that of my own father, whom I should consider in the light of its grandfather. At this point the ragazza, who had been directed to sparecchiare our coffee-cups, contrived to spill them over on the ground and break two. She was promptly tried and convicted for staring at the Signore Inglesè instead of fare attenzione, and was routed and driven away into the cucina, bearing the fragments. The Signorina apologized for her behaviour, saying she was quite insupportabile, having only been installed a week, during which she had smashed two piattini tondi, and sbocconcellato'ed the zuppièra. However, she was going to licenziare her this week, and get another, who might be better—"ma, che lo so io?" This is the last occurrence I can recollect as I said good-bye to the Faustina. The priest walked with me to my carrozza, and on the way pooh-poohed the idea, which I recurred to, of any possible irregularity in the marriage.

Now if I had known that it was this good man's duty, as a priest, to ignore the existence of the municipal marriage and its indispensable character (for without it no marriage is legal), I should have avoided a grave mistake. Strange as it may seem, I never realized this point, and went on for years under the delusion that the poor Annunziatina had been really legally married to Beppino; although the false version of his name might have invalidated the marriage. I remained in the dark by accident. The slightest spark might have illuminated it—a trivial turn in conversation—a passage in a newspaper! Any knowledge of another Italian marriage would have cleared it up in an instant. What a many novels there must be that would have told all about it! But no such chance occurred, and my only confidant was Hugh Desprez, whose Indian experience was little likely to set him on his guard in points of Italian law. Moreover, when I told him the results of my visit to Florence, I assured him that I had "made every enquiry" and was perfectly satisfied that so far as the marriage itself went it was valid; but that I thought Beppino had intended to shuffle out under the false name, or had relied on securing his Italian wife's silence by threats of withdrawing supplies. Things of this sort are often done, and succeeded in. I myself once knew a man who maintained two wives and two families in England, never excited the suspicion of either, and when he was ruined in business and his friends "got him out" to Australia, transported both his households with him on the same boat, one in the first class, the other in the steerage. That was genius! But Beppino might have bullied poor Annunziatina into silence without genius.

When I returned to London after transacting various business at Milan I did not find the General. He had gone to Ireland on military business. I was not in the habit of keeping secrets from Lossie, but in this case I was in for a fib or two. So I determined to do justice both to all the truth I could tell, and all the lies I was obliged to tell. My story, as it came out, was that at Florence I had come upon a six-weeks-old bambino both of whose parents were dead, and finding that it was named Cristoforo after some one I didn't know, had re-named it Cristoforo after my own Daddy, and adopted it. So it would have his name and be Christopher Vance, or Vancè. I said I had not gone to the bottom of the question of his parentage, and suspected that his mother, whose name was Vespucci, had not been well-treated by the father. In fact, every word I said was literally true; and had I only added that the father's name was Joseph Thorpe, and that Mr. Thorpe was a great scoundrel, would have been unimpeachable. But I felt very guilty in spite of my motives, and had to say over and over to myself, "Oh, Lossie dear, my Lossie of the bygone times, my Lossie Janey loved as well as I, it is on your behalf I take this stain upon my conscience. You shall never know the wickedness of the brother you loved, if I can help it. Nor shall his child—that is your own flesh and blood, dear Loss; that is your father's grandson as much as your own boy—ever be the worse for the loss of his name and the crime of his parent, if I can help it." And I thought to myself "what a terrible thing if there had been a posthumous child of the English marriage!" For, mind you, I had then no idea that one was anticipated, and took it for granted that had there been I should have heard of it. I also accepted without question the Italian marriage as sound. But even without inheritance the shock of an éclairçissement both to Lossie and Sibyl would have been enough.

So when Lossie threw a light on a certain preoccupation on her part, which seemed to me to prevent her taking enough interest in my adoption of Cristoforo, by suddenly saying to me, "I've never told you, Joe, but I suppose you've guessed, that there'll be a baby," I said to myself thank God for my well-intentioned *suppressio veri!* And had it been ten times as big I should have rejoiced.

I suppose I in my turn looked preoccupied, for Lossie said, "There, Joe, that's just like you to take no interest in Beppino's baby!" For Lossie was always half aware I loved her young brother languidly; and this time she looked quite tearful over it. Now suppose she had known whose baby Cristoforo was!

I saw I should have to have some teeth out over this business. But then—Lossie wouldn't!

CHAPTER LI

A LETTER FROM A MAN OF THE WORLD. THE GENERAL'S SATCHEL. JOE ARRANGES FOR HIS START TO BRAZIL. BUT HE GOES TO SEE CRISTOFORO AGAIN FIRST. HOW HE TOOK A WALK AT FIESOLE, WITHOUT JANEY. AND HOW HE HEARD THE WALDSTEIN SONATA ON THE TUSCAN HILLS. HOW CRISTOFORO TICKLED.

When Sir Hugh Desprez came back from Ireland a few weeks later, I took the first opportunity of showing him the packet of letters I had brought from Italy. I had not undone them. As in all our colloquies on such matters, we were alone after every one else had gone to bed. I laid the packet on the Library table, and lit my cigar. "There's the letters, General," I said. Then he also lighted up and we smoked in silence. The packet remained on the table untouched. He spoke first.

"You don't seem to want to open them, Joe?"

"I *don't* want. Besides, I have no right to. Now, you *have.* You're his executor."

"Yes—but I'm not bound to read his love-letters. I don't like the job, Joe."

"One of us must——"

"Why?"

"I don't know." So we smoked a little more. Then he said: "These letters would throw a light on the way he managed to delay so long without exciting her suspicion, or perhaps would show he did not succeed in doing so. It would do us little good to know either."

"None at all," said I.

"We might be able to infer from them what he supposed his own legal position to be. But *you* were quite satisfied the wedding was regular?"

"Only the false name. Otherwise all right."

"I admit that I should like to know this: Did he entrap this girl into a marriage he knew he could shuffle out of, or did he mean to stand by it if he was unsuccessful with Sibyl? It's *conceivable.* I should like another opinion. But that's impossible. Nobody can be trusted."

"Nobody. My own opinion is that he believed he could disown any marriage of Giuseppe Vance's—but also that he could ac knowledge or claim it. The law would in every doubtful case go on the principle, 'Heads the man wins, tails the woman loses.'"

"That is so. However, what we have to settle is—Shall we read these letters, or throw them in the fire?"

"Throw them in the fire. Here goes!"

"Half-a-minute, Joe! Don't be rash! What do you say to looking at the last letter only, and seeing when he wrote it, and where?"

"I don't mind anything you vote for, however indecisively. But left to myself I should burn the whole kit."

How one recollects little things! I can remember as Hugh cut the string of the packet of letters, that I thought to myself that that was the smallest penknife I had ever seen, and the hand that held it the largest and strongest. It comes out vividly now, five-and-twenty years afterwards!

"Most likely they're in order," said he. "Yes—at one end October of this year—at the other, October of last. Let's look at this last one—dated nowhere! Is that somebody coming?"

Yes, it was. It was Lossie, come down to look for something "What an atmosphere! How you men can sit in it, I can't imagine! Only my mother-of-pearl penknife. I left it on this table —never mind! The servants will find it to-morrow—lend me yours." And the General, feeling in his pocket for his own, brought out the missing article.

"I must have picked it up off the table unconsciously," said he. And Lossie departed with it, enjoining me not to keep Hugh up too late.

When I heard her coming, I had hurriedly picked up the letters and pushed them into a little wallet or despatch case of the General's that was standing on the table. It was an almost invariable companion of his—was as well known to his friends as himself. —He had carried it about with him for years, and used to say he would be quite lost without it.

"Now the letter!" said he. "You pushed them into the lining —my satchel's got very old of late years—however, it's got to last my time! Pull 'em all out——"

I did, and separated them on the table. We took up the letter we had been looking at, or rather he did—and went on to read it. I watched his face as he read; the concentrating attention, the increasing grip of the strong muscles of his jaw, the veins swelling more and more on the temples, the greater tension of the contracting brow. I knew now what Lossie had meant when she said the General's anger was terrible, and why she turned pale when she spoke of it.

When he had read through the letter he threw it over to me with an exclamation of anger very difficult to describe. "That's enough!" said he.

It was. I shall never, I hope, again see so cowardly and mean a disclaimer of a solemn obligation. It was a repudiation of his marriage, alleging that his victim had been throughout conscious that it was invalid—that he had repeatedly told her that his real name was not Vancé, and that he was not called Giuseppe in English. Had he ever imagined that she thought him in earnest he would have refused to make the concession he had made to her conscientious scruples. It was time to speak plain—the play was at an end. He should always fulfil all his real obligations to her, but others which he had entered into elsewhere compelled him to say farewell. It was very English Italian, which had made it easy for the General to read.

"This was the letter the poor little thing got just before that last relapse," said he. The pity that came in his voice with the words "poor little thing" was a relief to hear after the words and the sound that came before. I felt that Hugh was back again.

"Of course it killed her," said I. And he nodded assent. "And she never breathed a word of it to the other one—the cousin," he went on.

"Not a word, apparently."

"I tell you what, Joe," said the General, giving himself a great shake, like a dog. "We don't want to read any more of these letters. One's enough."

"One's quite enough," said I. And we put them all on the fire together, and felt happier when we had no further choice of reading them.

As we went upstairs (for I was staying on that night) Lossie was leaning over the banisters. "You ought to have been in bed long ago," said her husband. And she replied, "I thought I heard you roar, dear, some time ago—and I was afraid something was wrong. You weren't angry with Joe, I suppose?"

"Oh no—I wasn't angry with Joe. I say, Loss, do remind me to get my old satchel mended—it will all come to pieces—and I couldn't stand having a new one!"

How very strongly all the small details of this conversation come back to me! I have written down so many that are quite needless to my story.

In the weeks that followed this I was conscious that our interview about the two babies, actual and prospective, had not left matters exactly as they were before. I knew that my new character of having something to conceal, and being on the watch against enquiry, told upon my manner, and that Lossie noticed it. I did not know whether she would connect it with what she had said of my indifference to her news about Sibyl. It was painful; but I was only too glad not to rake the subject up, on any terms. I let the sleeping dog lie.

Three months passed. I made my arrangements about going to Brazil. I had undertaken to investigate and report on the possibility of the great Engineering scheme to the Government, and if my report was favourable it was expected to carry great weight. I had given a good deal of attention to work of this class, which had rather ousted the fabrication of machines and weapons from my mind. Civil Engineering on a large scale is the most exciting work there is. If you want sleepless nights, construct bridges across torrents. But I don't think appeal was made to me because I was credited with any special knowledge or skill; but because if I gave a favourable report, Capital would believe I had not accepted a bribe. Capital knows a lot about that sort of thing.

So I was to go to Brazil in the autumn. I looked forward to it with—well! almost with—pleasure. It would be a complete change, and when I came back (I was to be away over six months) I hoped I should find the current of events coursing in a tranquil stream, and all the unhappiness and disquiet of the present time forgotten. The interim was a very busy one, for Bony and I, in view of contingencies, were scheming the conversion of our business into a Limited Company, and putting it on a secure footing which the retirement of both or either would not endanger. I thought often of the conversation of long ago at Poplar Villa, when Dr. Thorpe suggested that I should take up Engineering seriously, and my Father undertook to jack up the roof of his works to make a top story for me. I could not bid the factory good-bye gladly, for was it not part of the old time? But that old time itself was slipping away. The slight—oh, so slight! —tension between me and Lossie had given me a new reminder that what was left must go in its turn. Nothing could be done —for it was not safe to speak freely now as of old. I would go to South America for a spell; things would get absorbed—superseded—somehow forgotten!

Meanwhile before I went away, I must just make one more excursion to Italy. Another interview with our Milanese allies would do no harm, and I wanted very much to see whether Cristoforo was really going to be as like his father as had been alleged; for I was afraid if he was I should lose interest in him. I told the General why I was going, but said as little as possible to Lossie. The fact is, I shrank from creating a position of dissimulation.

So at the end of May I put myself in light marching order and took a Cook's ticket for Florence. Lossie was too preoccupied with Sibyl and the impending arrival to ask many questions. I said I was going to Milan and should "try to go round by Florence and see my little protégé," and she said, "Do go and come back and tell us all about him—it would be so nice to hear." But I felt she was being distracted by Cristoforo's coming cousin—however, if she hadn't been she might have felt my duplicity in my voice.

It was a very different Florence from the Florence of last January. The population had found its voice and was singing about its amore and its cuore and its Maria. Very small boys indeed, who had no business to know anything about such matters, were singing about their cuore and their Maria in tremendous voices that their organization did not seem to warrant. They were audible hours before they became visible, and then were only just perceptible to the naked eye. But they filled the vault of heaven with particulars about their cuore, all to the same general sort of Tuscan tune that ends in its own special cadence, and suits all moods of the singer. Such was the genial influence of the sun, that even the butcher sang about his beloved as he slit a whole ox down the middle and converted it into a hideous V, that half filled his shop. Florence was determined to enjoy the cool weather (about 80 degrees in the shade) while it lasted; because it was soon going to be really warm, and we should only be able to work in the early morning and the late evening, and should lie fast asleep on the pavement in the coolest corner we could find, as happy as if it was really bed, for an hour at least on each side of mezzogiorno. And then after that it would be hotter still, and we should be able to do very little except fan ourselves and pray for a thunderstorm. Meanwhile we would be merry, and the frogs and the nightingales and the grasshoppers would help.

The waiter at the Minerva lamented, apropos of the deluge of roses that flooded the whole place, that it was a pity I hadn't come three weeks ago—the flowers had been very fine this year. He treated the present supply as a decrepitude. I have noticed that I never get anywhere in the nick of anything; it's only other people do that. I was reflecting whether I could adjust a remark to this effect in Italian, when the waiter perceived by magic that I should ultimately want a legno, and said should he call it now. I assented and he said *Pst!* to the hall porter, who called out *fiacchere!* to space; from which appeared a carriage under an awning and a driver under an umbrella to whom I suggested Fiesole, as before, if he had confidence in his havallo. And he said chè! chè!

If Florence had altered since January, Cristoforo had altered still more. He had become as pretty a bambino as one often sees even in Italy. If he ever was like his father the likeness had left him. A pair of magnificent black eyes, a stupendous voice, a promising head of hair and a performing pair of legs, very choice soles to his feet and an unimpeachable nape to his neck—that's Cristoforo as I realized him when I came to examine him in detail. As to the creases in his legs, language is powerless—this applies especially to one inside his thigh, in which the human finger vanished. He welcomed his adoptive father with an accolade, professing (through his agent, the Signorina Faustina) to remember having met him in early boyhood. He was loquacious in his own way, but he only used words that ended in *k* or *g*, omitting all except the last letter. He laughed a good deal at his own wit, and held me firmly by one nostril during our interview.

I had intended, if he had turned out like Beppino, to accept him as a duty, but avoid him as a pleasure. As he seemed so satisfactory and pulpy, and obviously going to be his poor mother's own son (as I saw from a portrait), I determined to pass a little time in his society, especially as I was going to be six months away. So I told the ragazza to pay the driver for me, and leave my valigia at the Albergo and I would stay on for a day or two. This was a new handmaid altogether—in fact, the second since the coffee-cup smasher.

I had experience of the inevitable extension into further fiction which follows any adventure in that direction, especially on the part of inexperienced persons like myself. I was not a clever liar. I had to invent a good deal to account for the absence of any communications from Beppino's executor (for whose existence I had vouched), and to rely almost without reserve on the Faustina's ignorance of English customs. I fabricated an England to suit the occasion—made it a country the like of which does not, I trust, exist anywhere. The way in which *noi altri* lived apart from each other and our families was, I said, a thing no Italian could understand. To me who knew them well it was a matter of no surprise that Beppino's few surviving relatives had not shown any vital interest in his marriage. I hinted that they were all Protestanti, and that feeling ran high among them against Cattolici. I did not make broad, bold statements on these lines, but poisoned the Faustina's mind with hypnotic suggestions. I presently saw my way to introducing the possibility that the famiglia might make a descent on Cristoforo, bear him off, and educate him as a Protestant. After this the Faustina showed a marked discretion in approaching the subject of Beppino's relatives. I told her I had his executor's full permission and approval in the course I had taken, and that I myself should always be guided by consideration of what his mother would have wished. I therefore hoped she would do nothing to provoke intervention on the part of his family. This she promised readily—unless the reverend father advised otherwise. I felt I had made that safe enough!

The Faustina gave me some lunch as before, and I remained through the heat of the day in the company of herself, the balia, and their charge. Towards sundown I turned out for a walk, and wandered along the road on the hill-face, looking over the glory of the sunset light on the world of roofs and domes in the plain below; over the distant Arno, a mirror giving back the rosy gold of the sky beyond the purple Apennines of Carrara. The bells were clanging in the tower of San Domenico—for Vespers, I suppose; but I never know—and the bells of a mule cart toiling up a road I could not see were ringing for their vespers too. And these meant, for the two mules and the supplementary donkey (probably it was a stone cart), rest in a little while; and for the human creature in charge, who sang short lengths of stornelli at long intervals, a supper of black bread and pasta and thin Chianti and a long cool night in bed.

What would the magic city in its glory have been to Janey and to me, could we have seen it together? To me it was nothing now—nothing but the city she would have seen. And the purple Carraresè peak, darker and darker against the orange glow of the horizon, was nothing now, to me, but the marble mountain we should have passed, she and I, just before the railway brought us to the city with the leaning tower, where we should have stopped. And San Domenico appealed to me in vain, and I cared not a straw whether the monk I could see, like a fat white maggot, in the Saint's walled garden below, went in to Vespers or not. For his bells were only the bells Janey would have heard but did not. But the jangle of the team told of tired beasts she would have pitied, and of a tired man who worked long hours at low pay, and could, for all that, sing. So when I came across him further on, I conversed with him and asked him if he had bambini. And as he had several, I asked him to buy them some piccolezzè as a present from me, and gave him, to his great surprise, something over his day's pay to buy them with. This was because Janey would have done so! How little the great billows that were rolling on still, to dash themselves to death against the cliffs of San Joaquim, knew of this far-off echo of their wild work of two years ago, among the hills of Tuscany!

For the whole world had now become to me the world Janey and I should have lived in together. It had an interest for me still though—a languid one—on its own account. I could still speculate on why that blazing star in the gold over there seemed to me to be definitely spoken of by Beethoven, as much so as though a Sonata were a catalogue. And then the great triumphant phrase of the Waldstein sounded like a sudden trumpet-note in my memory, and a weight went off my heart and left me free.

But why had my heart been weighted more than its wont? Simply because Janey would have enjoyed Cristoforo just as much as I did. I felt that that young beginner, as my Daddy would have called him, would become the baby Janey and I should have pampered and encouraged together, had she been here. And then he would wind his fat little self round my heart, and die in teething or get diphtheria, or tumble into a water-butt. Well! I should soon be in South America, anyhow! I went back to the albergo and fed, and wrote letters. Of course I wrote to Lossie and described Cristoforo, and was glad to be able (entrenched as it were behind the Post) to show a free sympathy about Sibyl's affairs, without fear of face-to-face catechism on mine.

I was very sorry when the time came to say good-bye to my figlioccio, as I called him—but I believe it was the wrong word, as I did not hold him at the font. He kissed me affectionately at parting, or his agent said he did. *I* should have said spluttered over—however, it was well-meant, and answered all purposes. I could feel his powerful hands in my beard, tickling, all the way to the Station.

CHAPTER LII

HERR PFLEIDERER DISAPPROVES OF BRAZIL. HOW JOE, YEARS AFTER, WENT TO LOOK FOR POPLAR VILLA, AND GRASS THEN GREW WHERE TROY TOWN STOOD. HOW BEPPINO'S SECOND SON (OR THEREABOUTS) WAS BORN. THE NEED OF BROWNING. OF A VILLA FOR LOSSIE AT SORRENTO, NOT FLORENCE. HOW THE GENERAL NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE DOCTOR, MORE'S THE PITY! JOE'S LAST HAPPY EVENING IN ENGLAND. HOW HE CALLED ON AUNT IZZY. AND OF MR. SPENCER. NOLLY SEES JOE OFF AT EUSTON. THE SEA, ONCE MORE!

I AM interrupted—just as I was going to get my Cook's ticket timbratoed for Milan (but this is only a *façon-de-parler*)—by my chess-friend, Herr Pfleiderer. He is rather late, and I had given him up. But there is a half-finished game on the board, and we shall conclude shortly after midnight if all goes well. I have laid him a wager that I will draw two games out of three, in which he shall always open King's Gambit, and I shall always refuse the Gambit, checking with Queen at Rook's fifth. He is very confident he will jegmade me effry dime. Very likely.

I foresee that I shall soon have to break it to the Herr that the time has come for our very last game, and that I shall be returning to Brazil. Suppose I do so, this evening! I may as well.

So as soon as the clangour of Miss Austin subsides, I mention to him that I have given notice for Michaelmas, and that I shall probably clear out and start even earlier. Why the young woman cannot place a tray with bottles and glasses and sugar and lemons on the table without producing the effect of an express train passing through our station without stopping, I do not know. But I take advantage of the calm that follows to make my revelation. The Herr immediately adopts the tactics of his nation.

"You do nod wand to go to Brazil. It is nod a blaze beople should go to. It is bankrubbed. There is a Revolution. You have no vriends in Brazil."

"Yes, I have—I've an adopted son there, a fine young fellow of twenty."

"Then you should not gum to Europe. It is absurd to gum to blazes and go back. I shall dague the bawn. And you jeg with the roog. And I inderboze knide. Why haff you an adopted son? Why is he not your own son? I do not ligue adopted jildren."

Herr Pfleiderer always treats all other people's affairs as having been referred to him. We finished our game without his making any concession to Brazil. "We gannod blay again for a vordnide," says he, as he makes ready to go. "I am going to Berlin." And he says good-bye, and I go back to my narrative.

The tickling of Master Cristoforo's ridiculous fingers in my beard died away by the time I reached the railway, but the memory of it lasted me all the way to Chelsea, where a visit to Bony on the evening of my arrival and a collision with his numerous progeny of all ages, rather swamped Cristoforo. I had some misgivings as to telling Jeannie about him, but I had to do so; because they would have heard of it in the end, and thought it a shame I hadn't told. But I treated it as merely a good-natured act on my part, not due to any special attraction in Cristoforo himself, but only to my having come by chance on a very young orphan with my Father's prænomen who seemed to me in need of a caretaker. I had a whim not to let the little party die of want, I said, and if I paid his piper why should he not bear my name? "Then why not have him over here?" said Jeannie. Because, I replied, I didn't want him to be choked in a London fog.

"Shan't know what to do without you, old chap!" said Bony as we sat on late in the evening.

"How's your old governor?" said I, skipping a few bars of the conversation. Bony tapped his head, and then shook it, which mean that old Macallister was failing rapidly (as I knew, not without aid from whiskey), and I drew my inferences.

"I shan't find you here, when I come back, Bony," said I.

"Probably not. But you'll find me in Perthshire, if I'm alive and the old boy isn't. Poor old Sawney!" For that was the name he went by, even with his sons.

"I wonder if I shall ever come to Perthshire." For I was worm-eaten with sad misgivings.

"What's the matter, man alive?" said Bony. "Why shouldn't you come to Perthshire? Who's going to keep you in Brazil? If I didn't think that railway concern sure to come to grief I wouldn't let you go."

"Oh, my dear boy, I was only thinking of the chances of Fate. Things are so untrustworthy. I shall be back in the spring."

"Well, Lady Desprez won't allow you to make a bolt, Joe. That's one comfort, at any rate!" And one *dis*comfort when Bony said this was my reflection that Beppino's sins had left a slur on my happiness when at Poplar Villa, which might have to be lived down.

"They talk of going to live at Sorrento," I said. "All but the hot months, of course. The General thinks of buying a villa there if he can get it. They would come to London in the summer, though."

"What's going to become of the old lady?" asked Bony. He meant Aunt Izzy. My memory of his question reminds me that the poor old soul has disappeared from my narrative. And naturally enough, for the evidence of Aunt Izzy's existence to our senses had partly disappeared, and with it had developed an instalment of the Logic that was to affirm her total non-existence as soon as touch and sight ceased as well as hearing. For the old lady had given up her battle against deafness—had surrendered at discretion, and seldom or never made her presence manifest. So she slips out of this story, as she had very nearly slipped out of our lives. All that was wanted now was that we should neither see nor touch her; and then she wouldn't be there at all, and we should disbelieve in her and say *requiescat in pace.* But I am leaving Bony's question unanswered.

"She'll live on at the Villa, of course. She needn't be alone. You never saw Edith Sant? Party of forty—going deaf herself."

"Never seen her. But I've heard of her from Jeannie, and I understood she wasn't quite——"

"She isn't quite. But she's a very old friend, and as she's getting deafer and deafer, is learning finger-language. She'll live with old Miss Thorpe, and they'll have theological discussions, and séances."

"Oh," said Bony, "is that their game?" I said it was one of their games; and wondered whether two Bogies on the other side whose evidence on this had ceased altogether, would find a new game, or fall back on that one! As for the poor old Aunt, I heard indirectly that she only ceased to be tangible and visible on this side some four years ago. She died at a good old age at Poplar Villa, in spite of the plague-pit underneath it, having just lived to the end of the last renewal of the lease, which she had made herself.

Poplar Villa is gone now. I would have faced seeing it, however sadly, had I been in time. But shortly after my return I drove down our High Road to Wimbledon, and it was all swept away;

and on its site were accommodated a Board School and a new street that was to develop the ripe building land behind, where I remembered Nolly playing cricket. A row of so-called cottages that were not cottages at all were on their way down one side of this road, and I went into one that was to let, and found to my horror that it was two flats, and I might have the lower one for seven shillings a week. A very small boy of eight who was eating an unripe pear informed me that this house was better than Poley's (?) next door, as there was a fizzing tree in the back garden. He took me out through smells, to the back yard. And there was my tree of the years long gone. But there was no green lawn now, and the whetstone of Samuel rang no more in the early summer mornings. Did Samuel ever have a new scythe, I wonder, or did the thin blade vanish in some other hand?

I gave the small boy sixpence, and he threw away his mumbled end of the pear, and ran to purchase something better; rousing the neighbourhood as he went with calls to favoured friends to come and share his luck. He was a generous boy, and I liked him. But I must get on with my narrative.

I had of course seen no *Times* advertisements up at Fiesole; so I was unaware on my arrival that, on the day I left, the widow of the late lamented Joseph Randall Thorpe had had a son at the town residence of her father, Bulstrode Curzon Fuller Perceval, M. P., of Park Lane, and Parrettsdown, Somersetshire. I thought it very likely though, and was not surprised when Jeannie told me. She had heard it from Maisie Thorpe, and that all was well. So we had left it alone and gone on to Cristoforo.

But I nursed a little flame of pleasure in my heart at knowing what a happiness this would be to Lossie. When I went over to the Villa next evening I had the luck to come on Lossie in a great state of exultation. The perfect sincerity of our rejoicing over the event on both sides had only one trifling flaw—that one of us put more side on than was necessary; and the other, knowing this fact, accepted it as no more than normal. If we had had a tiff, this would have been right and nice. But there had been none. It was like the case of a clean glass upside down on a shelf that you take down to drink out of. You know it's clean—oh dear, yes! But it won't be any the worse for a good rinse-out. We had our good rinse-out, and removed from our hearts the slight soreness that had never been there at all. Of course not!

These niceties call for Browning, to put them shortly for us. The man that wrote "strange—the very way love began! I as little understand love's decay!" at any rate understood enough to explain this little flutter of counter-consciousness, could we have employed him.

"Well, Joe!" said Lossie. "So now we can all breathe freely;"—over Sibyl, of course—nothing else! "And now you can tell me all about young Cristoforo."

Unfortunately the Turk was present, and her smallest brother. A good many difficulties arose in giving the explanations of Cristoforo that were demanded. Those who have had to confront and outflank young children on this subject of their provenance will understand what I mean. If your imagination can supply the conversation antecedent to the Turk's home-question, "Which *are* the Papa, then, in Italy?" you will see how we became involved. Anthropomorphism helped us at our need, although the Turk had to be said "shish, darling" to, for questioning the skill of her Maker.

"When I saw Bony to-day, Loss," I said, when quiet ensued, "he told me Phemie, the youngest but one, had adopted her elder sister's best doll, after hearing of Cristoforo. The riot was hushed down, but only by assuring them that mammas could not adopt the children of other mammas still living, and only Papas in any case. He told them Dolls had no Papas, being bought at shops."

"I'm glad I haven't got to do the next explanations in that quarter," said Lossie. "But now do tell me more about Cristoforo."

So I told her a great deal more—all quite true! And nothing false that was not mere repetition of what I had told before. I recurred to Cristoforo to the exclusion of other topics that knocked at the door, in order that I might not seem to shrink from particulars. I felt I was improving as a story-teller.

"I shall never see an organ-grinder now, Joe, without thinking of you. What do you mean to do with him?"

"Bring him up as an organ-grinder, naturally. We shall have plenty of time to think about that when he's done teething. What is Sibyl going to call her boy?"

"She would like him to be Beppino—because poor Bep was so much Beppino to her. But her father says it's un-English. No doubt it is. Most likely it will be either Joseph Curzon, or Randall Curzon. Let's go in the garden. Come along, children. Come and help to water the roses."

For the roses were still due at Balham, though the deluge-residuum of the Florence crop had been held a contemptible remnant by the Albergo Minerva. We shouldn't be in our full glory (of a few dozen blooms) for a month yet. But I transplanted my mind from Fiesole to London S. W. without much difficulty; saying very little though about my recent experience of flowers, lest I should seem to crow over Upper Tooting.

"I think Hugh's got the Sorrento Villa, Joe," said Lossie. "Can't we have the garden-pump, Samuel?"

"We could have it at once," said Samuel. But it seemed it "wouldn't work," though morally it was a perfect pump.

"There ain't any defect in the pump itself, only a screw's been wore, and loosened off the 'andle-plate. So when you rises, the coverin' comes up bodily. Otherwise you might say it was in fair order." I thought of the character my Father had given to pumps, long ago. So long ago! It seemed longer than it does now.

"It wouldn't take above a minute, or maybe two at most, to connect up the hose, and give you any supply—why, Lord, it could be done while I was a-tellin' you, only——"

"Only what, Samuel?"

"Only it's been took away to mend. Promised back it is on Tuesday—but there's no reliance."

Lossie could laugh still, and did it. And a new generation of birds in the greenhouse did as their forbears did twenty-odd years before, and broke out in responsive song. "I knew we should have to fall back on the common watering-pot," said she. "No engineering's any use, Joe, you're all alike!" I felt she was really the old Lossie, and was glad to be happy. For if Janey sees me now, said I to myself, she'll be glad too. It was the nicest little bit of time I had had for some while; and the children enjoyed it too, helping. The pots of water that the Turk did not tip over on the garden path, or on Desirée and a new Irish poplin she was making a tea-gown of for Lossie, and brought us out to show the braiding on, found their way either on to their mother, or their uncle Joe, or the rose-trees. It was Arcadia, and when Hugh came in, also jubilant, and announced that the Villa at Sorrento was an accomplished fact, I was quite sorry, as we had to go in to get ready for dinner and it was near the children's bedtime.

"You've really settled about the villa at Sorrento?" said I to the General, as we smoked in the evening, out in the garden.

"It is as good as settled. I take it for three years at a rental, with the refusal of the freehold. It's not to be sold over our heads. Perhaps I shall end my days there—my days in this world. You see I am to all intents and purposes out of harness now, and I've seen a deal of service in my time. I'm turned sixty."

"Could you be called out again on active service?"

"Oh dear, yes! But of course it would be optional, practically. I could excuse myself on the score of antiquity."

"But should you?"

"Not if I thought I could be of any use."

Any one who did not know Sir Hugh Desprez as I did might have suspected him of affectation in talking thus of his antiquity. "Turned sixty" did not prevent his seeming at the very prime of his natural life. Men have different primes. To see him as he stood there that evening in the half-light of the moon and sunset, one would have said no further maturity was possible; but that as the slight touch of coming grey in the hair was lost in the mixed gleam, no present decadence was visible. He retained to the full the flavour (as it might be called) of not being in uniform, and not being on horseback. Except for the gray, and that thirteen years of absorption had told upon the lip scar, he was the same man that had looked so pityingly into that mirror at Oxford. Five years after that evening on the lawn, when at a few hours' notice he started for India, to join the army in Afghanistan, there was not a word of misgiving in Lossie's letter that reached me at Rio Grande about his age; only about the reckless way in which he exposed himself needlessly to danger. Probably you know that he never returned from that expedition.

"I'm glad about this baby of Sibyl's," said he. "It won't stand in the way of her marrying again." Then some brain-wave passed between us, for I feel sure his next words came for my sake. "She's quite young, you see—and think how little she had of him! Deduct for the six months they were separated, in which he negotiated his other marriage, and a solid twelvemonth really spans the whole."

"I shall be uneasy," said I, "about it all. Not morally, because I consider I am giving Cristoforo a new birthright in exchange for the birthwrong I am acquiescing in. I mean I shall be afraid of a big burst-up."

"My dear boy," said the General. "I only wish there were as little chance of some other legitimacies I know of being flawed as there is of this. Cristoforo won't find it out——"

"He's very sharp!"

"No doubt! But he has to attend to the Commissariat. You can't do two things at once. As for any one else, trust his mother's family to do nothing that will stop the supplies. And even if they were ever to identify Giuseppe Vancé with Joseph Randall Thorpe, the false name might invalidate the marriage."

"But Giuseppe and Joseph are the same name—and I thought that in England at least, the nome di famiglia——"

"Didn't count? It would be a doubtful point. But I don't believe any Italian contadino family would run the risk of getting their daughter's marriage, which is now held legal—isn't it?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Getting it thrown into ambiguity-land to secure—to secure what? They would have no object——"

"I see your point. Well!—I won't fidget about it."

"And as for your own share in it! Why, my dear boy," and the General put his arm round my shoulders, schoolboy-wise, as we walked on the lawn in the dry, warm night air, "what does your connection with the whole affair amount to? You have had the knowledge of the deed of a damned scoundrel forced upon you, and are keeping a painful silence for the sake of its victims. And you are providing the principal surviving victim with a better father than Nature had given him."

"Ma che vuole?" said I, imitating the Tuscan letter we had read together. We laughed, and Lossie said out of the old Nursery window above, "You two seem very merry down there in the moonlight. What's the joke?" I forget the reply.

When Hugh said "damned scoundrel" I felt his words tighten the muscles of the arm on my shoulder. I thought of the three-year-old little Joe looking at books with me up in that very Nursery, and there was Lossie at the window!

"I hope Bep isn't damned, *sine die,* for all that," said I. And the General said very gravely, "His Father may forgive him—if he knew not what he did," and then we took a turn or two, and I would fain have forgotten him. But he hung about the mind of my companion.

"I never quite made him out," said he. "I know you and the Doctor accounted for him by some form of backward growth which I never rightly understood; though Thorpe often talked of it. Perhaps you and he saw Beppino the man very little. I saw him more in his man's character—especially when we were at Sorrento, and after. Sometimes when a man goes on living a great deal at home as he did, he gets a sort of double character—his home self harks back on his childhood, his other self looks ahead."

"Dr. Thorpe didn't mean that. He meant that *he* had never grown—himself! His intellectual powers and his body had matured, but his spirit remained a baby. If that was so, an overwhelming accès of the passion of passions—what he called Love—would sweep the baby will before it, and employ the mature intellect to compass its ends." But it occurred to me, as I said this, that we might find excuses for almost anything if we insisted on the existence of a soul or spirit that was neither mind nor body, and laid all our bad actions at the door of the latter. However, I would give Beppino the benefit of the doubt, and hoped (rather chillily, I admit) that he would be able to expiate his guilt and start fair on the ground that in some sense he "knew not what he did." Perhaps the ecclesiastics of Jerusalem for whom divine forgiveness was first asked on that ground, would have behaved otherwise had their souls been better grown. But I did not say this to the General. For to him as to many another noble man I have known any reference to the events of Calvary as occurrences that actually happened, was distasteful if not painful. They were not History, but Scripture, and broadly speaking might be considered to have happened on Sunday.

"I never understood the Doctor," said he; "nor he me! I used to tell him so, and that I was just an old-fashioned Christian, and my Bible was enough for me. And he would reply, 'Well, Hugh, Christianity is the best working hypothesis of Life, so far.' And I once wanted him—it was only a few days before his death—to tell me more exactly what he thought about it, and he was telling me, when unfortunately Violet came in, and he stopped short."

How well I could imagine it! The General and I chatted a little longer on the lawn, as there was no Violet to silence us, and then went in and talked about the children with Lossie.

I have always counted that evening my last happy evening in England. For in the two months that passed before I started for New York on my way to Rio I was desperately busy, for one thing. For another, the General's family absorbed Lossie and her children, and when not in Pall Mall (as was very much the case) the General himself. A turn at the seaside put the finishing touch on our restrictions, and though I saw Lossie to say good-bye, it was one of those unsatisfactory good-byes under protest, when a pretence is made by both that they are sure to see each other again, and they know quite well they are not, and are sorry; yet have a sneaking gladness at avoiding the pain of a real farewell. I think I must have known at heart that it *was* one, by the way I hugged the children. Randall, the eldest, a great big boy home from school, was too proud and manly to be hugged; but not to cry in a corner because Uncle Joe was going away for ever so long. He and I were great friends, though I have mentioned him very little. The Turk wished to accompany me and defy Society.

Fate was unkind also about Bony and his wife. Old Sawney might just as well have died three months later, instead of taking them away from me to witness his final adieu to the whiskey bottle, and leaving Chelsea lonely. He summoned them too on a false pretence that he was *in extremis* and then rallied briskly, and kept them hanging about for six weeks or more. So I saw very little of them.

I think I must have disbelieved in the date of my return, or I should not have gone to Poplar Villa to say good-bye to it, when no one was there but the old Aunt. Edith Sant had come on temporarily and acted as the Medium at the séances in which I was the spirit and Aunt Izzy the mortal, or *vice versa*. Communication was by fingers as far as Miss Thorpe went. The phenomena were unconvincing, and I wouldn't stop to lunch, thank you, and said good-bye. I walked out once more into the garden and looked at the pear-crop, said good-bye to Samuel, and came back through the door my dear old Dad and I had wiped our boots at. And then the carriage gate swung to, and its latch overpassed its mark, and hesitated to and fro as a latch that would fain avoid closing on an old friend for the last time. It did it in the end though, and I came away with the web of pain in my eyes and temples, and vague misgiving in my heart; thinking how when I first came out of that gate Lossie ran down the steps and gave me cake. And now—I was not going back to my Mother! nor to Janey in Chelsea —only to her empty house.

However, there was her Father, poor old boy! I went and said good-bye a good deal to him, and made a solemn promise to come back in six months. That promise I ranked as my great achievement in falsehood, next after my fibs about Cristoforo. Dear little Cristoforo! How I did hope he was assimilating that balia at a great pace. But I didn't mean to be false outright—I really meant to come back rather later than I said—two months or so. However, I never saw my father-in-law again. He joined the Choir of Invisible Solicitors some seven years later. In fact he only survived the news of the death of his eldest daughter (Lossie's great friend Sarita) a few weeks. It was after that that I heard from Nolly, who was his partner in business and his executor, that a box with Janey's name on it had come from Ceylon with other effects of Sarita's, and that he would prefer that I should open it. I replied to this (I quite believed it) that I should come to England shortly, and would send for it. Thinking to save trouble I wrote at the time to the Pantechnicon people, enclosing a written delivery order to be signed by them and given up to Nolly, to call for the box and keep it with my other things until my return. That reminds me that Nolly could find me now, if he wanted to, by going to the Pantechnicon for my address. He would only have to hunt up a receipt thirteen or fourteen years old!

It reminds me also to mention that it was during this lonely interval in Chelsea, before my departure, that I braced myself up to do what I knew must be done in the end, and broke up my home—Janey's home! It was easier for me that none was there to see or speak to me. The burial of the furniture in the Pantechnicon was, however, the most I could make up my mind to; I could not pick and choose and say I will send this here and that there. So there I interred them, and there they will remain, for all I can see, until the annual payment ceases; and then they will go to auction, to pay expenses, and persons of prey will snap them up for an old song. But the tune of that old song will be none of those that Janey played. Those are all gone now, unless indeed some echo of them mixes in the music of the seas that break for ever against the rocks of St. Joaquim, and almost reach the little cenotaph above; on which one word alone, her name, is written.

I last remember, in that London of my old life, the face of Nolly, who came to see me off at Euston. He is almost the only one of all I have seen since—just a minute by that chance that I told you of. Oh, how I longed to take the hand of Lossie's brother—the hand that bade me Godspeed that day at Euston Station, twenty years ago! He would have been himself to me, as of old; for I doubt if he knew much ever of the cause of the rift between me and Lossie. He only thought I had slid away, as folk do, in life. But I should have waked a many wolves in my renewal of the past. Better to let them lie. It would all be right in the end.

The sun went down on a stormy sea as I lost sight of land on the Cunarder, bound for New York. Yet I was not thinking of whether I should return or no, but of the endless rolling billows under the great cliffs of Portugal, and the lonely cenotaph upon the hill.

CHAPTER LIII

WHAT JOE HAS BEEN DRIVING AT. HE HAS CRISTOFORO OUT TO HIM IN BRAZIL. HOW THE GENERAL DIED LIKE A HERO AT MAIWAND. LOSSIE GOES TO FLORENCE. A PLEASANT LETTER FROM HER AT VILLA MAGONCINI. ANOTHER, WITH A PLEASANT POSTSCRIPT. JOE TAKES A RIDE AND SHOOTS A HALF-BREED. ACCIDENT TO CRISTOFORO. JOE'S ANSWER TO THE LETTER. MORE CORRESPONDENCE, TERRIBLE TO JOE. ALL IS ENDED. "THIS IS FOR LOSSIE."

I SHALL soon come to a point at which I shall account my self-imposed task finished. Before I complete what little I have left to tell, let me try to make it clear to my imaginary reader (as it is to myself) what it was that originally I proposed to do—that I meant to cover a quire or two of foolscap with—that has spread out over the best part of a ream.

I have lived two distinct lives; one of thirty-odd years in Europe; one of twenty-odd in South America and the States. You must realize that the latter is, or was till two years ago, my life of the present; one of excitement and strenuous activities; of contest and effort; a life sometimes in the open with hunters and fishers; even of military service and peril of death among barbarians. It has nothing to do with the story, which is an effort on my part to think back, now as I approach the end, into the dear old past this stormy twenty years has nearly effaced.

Had I not come away from Brazil, it never would have occurred to me to make this effort. Nor would it have been possible with my surroundings to bring back to my mind all I have recalled and written. In fact, had it not been for the first clues, supplied by Lossie's letters which I got in the box from the Pantechnicon, I should have found it hard to make a start. It was those letters that brought it all back. But my intention has throughout been to stop my narrative abruptly at the end of my European life, if only because I am coming to an end of the undertaking that brought me back to England. I think I have mentioned the history of musical instruments I am engaged on, which has caused me to frequent the British Museum reading-room for two years past. It was begun some time since in New York; and when three years ago a fracture of the left arm, following on a period of great strain and fatigue, made it really necessary that I should take serious repose, I took it in hand again at Rio Grande, which has been my Brazilian anchorage, and was so exasperated at my want of documents that I saw I must either give it up or come to Europe to find them. In spite of considerable losses in South American investments (notably Argentine railways) I was still well enough off to indulge myself in a long holiday, or indeed to retire from work, without withdrawing supplies from any dependent. Reasonable economy was necessary—but no more—and the chambers I am occupying answered very well, though, had I known it would be over two years, I might have sought out some better rooms, with a better-tempered proprietor. My idea at first was to go back in a twelvemonth at most. I am very near the completion of my historical work now; three months, I think, might finish it. I shall then go straight back home, as soon as I have made arrangements with the Publishers.

Having interposed this word of explanation, in writing which I have not seemed unreasonable to myself, I go on to the fragment of narrative that is wanting to complete my European life, and shall add no more to it than belongs to my subsequent correspondence with Lossie and her husband; that being the only link that, after my departure to America, connects me with the events I have narrated. Of course I exchanged letters with Bony until his death, and with my father-in-law. I heard from Jeannie about seven years ago—an account of my dear old friend's last illness, and how his mind wandered back to the old days of St. Withold's, and the great fight. I had other correspondence too, from my stepmother in Worcestershire and so forth—but after about ten years it died down and I felt *my* Europe was a thing of the past.

It should be clear from the above that my life of twenty years past forms no part of my scheme; I have only now to deal with a sequel of my European life, which overlaps it. I need not tell anything of the delays that prolonged the stay I had at first proposed to make, or of the effect that a life of great activity and excitement had on one who sadly wanted influences of the sort to counteract a growing morbidness and reserve, the fruits of past unhappiness. As a matter of fact, one undertaking followed another; each one always beginning before its predecessor ended, in such a way that no pause for withdrawal presented itself; and the time slid away till near a quarter of a century had somehow gone since I first projected a journey to Brazil.

I had, however (as will be seen) few inducements to come back during the greater half of my time there.

It very soon occurred to me that if I was to have any advantage from Cristoforo while he was still young and succulent he would have to come out to me. After two or three postponements I began to have misgivings about the genuineness of my proposals to return, and in the course of my second year found I was beginning, as it were mechanically, to throw out hints in my letters to the Signorina Vespucci about the advantages South America offered to Italians. The bait took, and I was not much surprised to receive from the Faustina herself a proposal to bring Cristoforo out to his adopted parent. The Faustina, it also appeared, had become engaged to an Italian Officer, with the stipulation that she should not be obliged to part from Cristoforo. If her fidanzato could be certain of an impegno on his arrival he wouldn't mind coming too. So we were suited all round, especially as I at once got preferment beyond his wildest dreams for Cesarè Nissim, which was the fidanzato's name. The Signora Nissim continued in charge of Cristoforo during his infancy, and when he came to schoolboy age surrendered him to me, with many tears, owing to the increase of her own family. I made new arrangements for my boy, which don't come into my story.

My correspondence with Lossie went steadily on, as also with Bony. The dream that I should return was seriously treated by both for many years. I can't find any hint of any other possibility until Lossie writes in '78. "We quite despair, dear Joe, of ever seeing you again—do think it over seriously, and next time a contract is to be signed to tunnel the Andes, or bridge the Amazon, pause a little and think of your friends in Europe. It would be so good to see your dear old face once more, here at Sorrento. And still better to see you once again at the old home. The young people are all growing up at a great rate, but they don't forget their Uncle Joe. Randall is quite a model Etonian; only I don't fancy he will be his father again. He's very studious—he may end his days a Bishop! Fancy Papa's grandson a Bishop!" and goes on to say how all the children talk about me, even the Turk, young as she was when we parted. We generally exchanged letters two or three times in the year, till the change came.

In '79 came her letter telling how Hugh had started at a week's notice to join the Army in Afghanistan. She had tried hard to persuade him to let her go too. But he was firm about this. What would she gain by being at Peshawur if he was shot at Cabul? She might just as well be at Sorrento. Then how about the children? So she consented to remain with a heavy heart, and in time came the news of the disaster of Maiwand, and his death at Candahar. My memory serves me ill about details, and her letters give very few; of course she knew I should read the story over and over again in the newspapers. She only dwells on little personal matters I should especially recollect. Did I remember the little wallet he called his satchel, that he never would part with if he could help it. It was that very one the bullet that killed him passed through! Of course I did. How well I now recollect pushing Beppino's wicked letters away in it. Thank Heaven! my Cristoforo never reminded me who his father was.

It was about six months after this that Lossie wrote that she was going to sell the villa at Sorrento. She wrote from Poplar Villa, where she and the children were remaining much later than for many years past, as it was mid-October. She shrank from the return to the Sorrento Villa with all its associations with her husband. But she had lived too much in Italy to be able to live anywhere else. So she should leave the sale to the Agents, and take the children to Florence to see if anything suitable could be found there. "You know," she wrote, "I have always had such love for Florence because my darling Joey (Beppino) had such a nice time there—just before his marriage, you remember?" I remembered. "I should so like to take his boy and mine to see the Spanish chapel and the Benozzo Gozzoli frescoes he used to talk so much about." Then this letter goes on to say what a dear fellow young Beppino, Sibyl's boy, has grown, and what amazing talents he is showing, and what high moral qualities; and how fortunate this is, as he will be, when he comes of age, heir to the unentailed portion of his grandfather's property. For his grandfather had been pitched off his horse in the hunting-field, and his next-door neighbour had been unable to stop and had ridden over him and been in at the death. Meanwhile Death had been in at the mortal tenement of poor Mr. Fuller Perceval, and had taken its tenant to Another Place—an Upper Chamber, let us hope. All his devisable property was left (subject to his widow's life-interest and some legacies) to his grandson Joseph Randall Thorpe. All the more reason, I thought, why no doubt should be cast on Joseph Randall's legitimacy.

A letter followed this one of Lossie's at a quicker interval than usual; about two months. It was written at Florence from the Hotel Nuova York; and I was not absolutely sorry it wasn't from the Minerva. The less my footsteps were trodden in the better. Remember that nothing of this sort ever passed without a little twist to my inner self, that it was keeping something back from Lossie. How I should have rejoiced to speak out freely, and get into the fresh air once more! The letter was all about the Villa Magoncini on the Road under Fiesole, that turns to the right before you get to San Domenico. It was a perfect Paradise—only wanted one or two stoves in the rooms—had never been modernized nor Anglicized nor Americanized—and could be bought outright with two poderi for two thousand pounds. She was just posting a cheque to the agent with direction to complete the purchase forthwith. It was too late to tell her how much of that money would go into that agent's pockets. So I only wrote congratulations and said I wished I could be there to see.

The next letter is in May, and they are all settled at the Villa "to the boundless joy of the girls, and would be to mine also, if—but you know, dear Joe, as well as it can be known, what that *if* means. I do wish you could be here, for I could talk to you of Hugh. There is no one here now that I can speak of him to but the babes, and they are only babes. Even when Violet comes out, it is little comfort to hear that 'we are told' this, and it is 'wrong to doubt' that. It would be such a happiness to hear Papa's voice, saying things one knew he meant."

Then follows much about the villa and the chapel and the contadini and the huge white oxen. "Can any one, I wonder, make these glorious creatures go an atom faster than bas-reliefs or induce them to stop when they don't want to? Your Turk (do you know she's nearly nine—isn't it awful?) wanted to kiss one of them, and he shook his head slightly, and the wind of it knocked the Turk down." And so forth. All of which gave me pleasure to read, and to write in answer to. My next letter was not to be so pleasant.

It was written in September, at the time of the Vintage. I saw as I opened it a large P. S. on a separate sheet. Not quite like Lossie, I thought to myself. However, never mind now; we should come to it in time. I settled down to read the letter.

"It was a splendid Vendemmia. The whole household was at work, and Paolo was even recommending that a new tino should be obtained forthwith at any cost, as the old ones would never be big enough. It was so funny to see Dick (the Towerstairs) trying to smoke large cigars and cut grapes at the same time.

"Really there is nothing in the world like Tuscany, in the vintage. The great white oxen dragging the loads of botté up to the Cantina is the most majestic sight in nature, and we all felt ashamed (except Dick) of sitting gormandizing at lunch indoors when tocco came, while all the contadini were hard at work again after black bread and the thinnest wine man ever drank."

So ran on the letter, through eight pages, ending: "We only want you here, dear old Joe, you and your Italian boy, and it would be perfect." A very nice letter, and I almost felt I was with them in Tuscany.

But what was all this? How about the postscript? The first dozen words made me grave and attentive. The first sentence showed me a serious danger ahead. By the time I had read through it I was already feeling that I must keep cool. You know what one is when one feels one must keep cool. Here is what I read:

"I really do not know, dear old Joe, if I ought to repeat to you the monstrous piece of nonsense that has come round to us about you and your Italian boy. It is too bad that such rubbish should get about. Fancy it's being said, in the face of all the facts, that the boy is your own son! Having written it, I feel so angry with myself for having done so, and as if I ought to tear it up. Of course I at once told Violet, who told me (and also what I could not believe to be true that 'everybody' was saying it), that I knew all the particulars about the boy; and that everybody's version (if he really said it) was entirely wrong. I asked her to tell me who everybody was, in this case, and how everybody came to know anything about you. Violet said the Seth-Pettigrews, who at any rate knew all about it, although I might choose to think them nobody, had told her. She said of course they knew nothing about you, but they knew the Signorina Vespucci years ago, and she had charge of 'your baby.' I cannot tell you how angry Vi made me. You know I am very fond of Vi, but you know how disagreeable she can be when she likes. As for the story itself, don't let it make you uncomfortable. I am not at all sure I hadn't better destroy this, after all. However, it's always better to be out in the open, as Papa used to say. I shall call upon Mrs. Seth-Pettigrew as soon as they come back from Via Reggio, and tell her the facts, and I am sure I shall find that Vi has made the most of some chance word, just to vex me about you. You know she always went on those lines. It's a sort of *parti pris* with her; though *why*, Heaven knows! And as for the Seth-Pettigrews, they are the biggest gossips in Florence, and that is saying a great deal. However, dear old boy, don't let their rubbish fidget you. I shouldn't write it, only of course it will be nice to have your letter back to enable me to squash it altogether."

I read this through a dozen times—but could get no forwarder in my task of keeping cool than to say over and over again that I must do so. I felt my pulse going quicker and my head growing hotter. The worst of it was there was no living creature I could consult.

"Come stai, Daddino caro? Come stai? Mi pari malinconico," said my boy Cristoforo, the unconscious cause of it all. I had taught him Daddy; and of course, being Tuscan-born, he made it a diminutive. I could not talk it over with the little man—not quite! But I could surely with Signora Nissim? Could I? No—I couldn't. How was I to tell her, please, that the sorella of our boy's father was in want of proof that I wasn't that father myself? Perhaps that is too bold a restatement of Lossie's concluding words—but they seemed to me to have that meaning in the bush. No, I could not speak even to her!

Oh, why—why—need Lossie ever go to Florence? Was there none of the swarm of towns on the Riviera that would have done as well, where no living soul knew aught of me or mine? And if Florence, why Fiesole? I got half mad trying to think what I could write to her, tore everything I began, and ended by postponement. Meanwhile, how to keep off a fever? I could ride over to Torviedro, where I was wanted on business, about forty miles off. I could ride all through the tropical night. That would suit me now exactly. There was a nice full moon just climbing off the mountain edge over there. The road was bad and I could not go fast; but I waked my man I went to see in the dawn, and made him give me breakfast. I passed the day in activity and excitement, the great remedy for all trouble, went down in a mine where the miners were in mutiny, and anticipated the police by shooting a half-breed through the head. Any one under too great a strain of nervous tension finds homicide a great relief. But I was destined to have a still greater antidote administered to my feverish symptoms. For I rode back next night under a diminished moon and arrived again at dawn to find poor Cristoforo in the hands of the doctor, with his head bound up. He and a little friend of eight had found a pointed knife, and were playing most peacefully at assassinations when he did his performance of the victim wrong, and got very badly cut.

He got quite well in a few days, and he and his friend Pepito showed me with the paper knife how they were doing it, and why it went wrong. But I believe his mishap was good for me, and when a week after Lossie's letter came I nerved myself up to answer it, I felt much better qualified for the task than when I tried before. I can recollect my reply to the postscript, but not the whole letter. Here it is:

"As to your postscript, dear Loss, I hardly know what to say more than that the false gossip about me and my little man is evidently a misconstruction put upon the circumstances under which I took possession of him. Perhaps the people at the Hotel got a report of my behaviour at our first introduction, and could not ascribe it to any one short of a father. You know you used always to say, like Mrs. Crupp, I was a 'mother myself.' That is really the only theory I can formulate to account for the absurdity. This letter will take too long to reach you for anything I say in it to influence matters. But I am sure your judgment will have been right about what amount of contradiction is most likely to procure truth. I should say simply deny it, and leave the facts to make out their own case." Then I went on with a long undisturbed letter, telling all about my moonlight ride, and the miners' meeting and Toforino's game of murder with little Pepito, and the amazing musical genius of little Giuseppe Nissim, who at four was already a passable violinist. Lossie would remember, I said, that Madam Nissim was the Signorina Vespucci, Cristoforo's mother's cousin, whom she said the Seth-Pettigrews had known.

I did not hear from Lossie again till after the new year, the last letter I ever had from her; and though she is still alive and well, I shall never have another. But in the interim, as near as I remember at the end of November, the Faustina came to me laughing, with a letter she had just received from the Signora Lèdidesprez (which she treated as all one word). She had written that I was not to see it—but that was too absurd! the thing was a mere joke to laugh about—not to be taken too seriously, so I need not look so anxious about it. Che! che!

The letter was to ask Madame Nissim, as a special favour, to write one line to disabuse the Signori Seth-Pettigrew, whom she would remember at Fiesole seven years ago, of a foolish idea that they had—and then followed particulars, and a reference to the persistency of the Seth-Pettigrews. But this would be silenced at once by a word from Madame Nissim, who had known Cristoforo's parents. She hoped Madame Nissim would say nothing to me about it, as it would very likely seem more important to me than it really was; but she had no right to impose conditions. Of course she herself knew it was nonsense. But people were very difficult to convince when once they got hold of an idea. The letter was written in very fair Italian.

"But I don't know any Signori Seth-Pettigrew," said the Faustina. And we were quite unable to identify these persons, and gave them up as a bad job. It occurred to me afterwards that perhaps il Signora Scappatigre, whom I had heard of from Faustina, might have something to do with them, but at the time we did not connect them up.

"Ma non lo capisco!" said she, suddenly attacked by reflection, "La Signora Lèdidesprez *is* the sister of Toforino's babbo——" and looked mightily bewildered. For, relying on the gap between Rio Grande and Florence, I had spoken of Lady Desprez as Beppino's sister.

"Cara Faustina," said I, "there are some things I cannot explain to you fully, because you do not understand us English. But *you* know who Toforino's babbo was, and that he had the same name as myself? Depend upon it that is how this gossip got about. Don't you write to the Signora! I'll write and make it all clear. I wish I *was* my boy's real Babbo." I then pointed out that though Lady Desprez knew I had adopted an Italian child, she never knew it was her own nephew. She had left the matter to her brother's executor, and thought his son was with his wife's relations.

"Ma com' è strano," said the Faustina, "di lasciafare così! Se fosse stato un nipotino mio!"

"You would have done differently. But you are not a Protestante, Faustina! Remember that il povero Signore wanted his son brought up a Cristiano."

I wasn't sure I should not have to put a big lie on the top of all this, and swear that Beppino's family had been rabbiatoed by this wish for his son's education, which they had found dwelt upon in his letters that I carried back to London. But luckily Faustina was as wax in my hands, and made no difficulties about leaving the answer entirely to me. I told her I could clear it all up. But I did not consider it necessary to write to Lossie again about it. If she got no answer she would only conclude the letter had never reached. Any word I added to my last letter might merely stir up and renew what would otherwise die down and be forgotten.

Then in time came the terrible letter to which no reply was possible, except indeed I had written the whole truth without reserve. The choice I had to make was whether I should or should not inflict on Lossie the knowledge that the brother she had cherished in her memory for years, making him each year more an idol than the last, was a villain; and that his boy was a bastard—the boy that she had almost made her own; that this boy would like enough lose his splendid inheritance from his grandfather, unless indeed his father's treachery to his mother could be shown to be the worst of all treacheries (almost) that men of his type gain their end by. And she herself—the woman on whom I should throw the burden of this wrong, who would have the task of telling Beppino's widow what manner of thing her adored husband had been—was she not *my* Miss Lossie?—that same Miss Lossie that came upon my childhood in a gleam of sunlight that day long ago at Poplar Villa—and turned my youth from what it might have been to what it was? And did not that little Joey that clung to her skirts grow to be this very Beppino?

No!—his memory should remain sweet in her mind, and his wife's, and his son's—aye! both his sons'—for all that I would ever say to any one of them.

But oh! it was hard to think of the price at which her immunity from this nightmare must be purchased. Not the price to me—that I would pay cheerfully, and live through the rest of my time, and see my boy launched happily in life, if I could. Janey would know—or was not there, in which case nothing mattered at all! But poor Lossie! She would have to live through her days, without Hugh, and to believe that her dear other little brother had turned out foul in the end—or at least, if not foul, a man with a mask on, capable of a new love, of some sort or other, almost while the ink was wet on the pen with which he wrote of his wife's tragic death. Well, it was better she should think that, than know the truth. As for me, I could bear it, and would. Janey would know all about it, except she was not. That would be all right. But, poor Lossie!

This that follows is her letter. I have read it again, for the thousandth time, and do not see that I could have done other than I did.

"VILLA MAGONCINI, FIESOLE, January 16, 1881.

"MY DEAR JOE: I must write what I have to write, although my heart breaks to write it. Oh, why could you not trust me, after all the long years we have been brother and sister? It was not a crime that you committed! Had you married another wife in Portugal, on your road back after Janey's death, it would have been no *crime*. Had you done so and then come to me and said, it might be hard for me to understand, but that you would be happier so—I should only have said let it be so—and taken your new wife to my heart as I took your old. It would have been *strange!* but such things have been, and will be again. And you would have been to me still my other little brother—my darling little Joey's namesake—the little boy that picked the pears, and went up the chimney. Oh, do you remember?

"But that you should do this thing and conceal it—conceal it from *me!* For I have been your sister, have I not? Oh, how my heart went out to you that dreadful day when I found your name in the list of passengers, and knew that Janey must be gone. And not then only, but so often. And in all this long absence in America, how I have thought of you and your boy—that I did not know was your own—thought of you and prayed for you and longed for your face again, that we might talk of Janey and Hugh together—for now, I thought, we should be alike—in trouble a brother and a sister, as in our happiness in the old days. But you could conceal this that you did from me, and almost deny it; and all my trust in you that was so strong—it is all gone, and the young folk wonder why mamma sits and cries—for I have told them nothing and shall tell them nothing, and I hope Violet will be silent.

"But it is useless for me to write on in this way—useless for me—useless for you. If ever we meet again in this world, I will be friends, dear Joe, for the sake of my father and yours, and all the long past, and above all for Janey's sake. And I will never dream for one moment that this marriage of yours meant that you forgot or could forget Janey—that I *cannot* believe! The most likely thing I can imagine is that this poor girl who died, Annunciatina Vespucci, loved *you,* and the thing came to your knowledge, and that you married her in a sort of Quixotism. But if so, *why not have told me?* It is that hurts me so.

"I must, I suppose, tell you how I came to know of it. I think I wrote to you that I had heard some gossip to the effect that Cristoforo was your son. Of course I disbelieved it, as I said. But it would have been a relief, although I did not allow myself to think so, to receive a letter from you saying plainly who the boy's father was, which you would have been surely justified in doing for his own sake when it came to ascribing him to yourself. But I got no letter from you—of course it's a long post. And in the meanwhile the Seth-Pettigrews came back from the sea, and I called and asked them what they knew. Violet's story was a little exaggerated, but not much. They had plenty to tell me of what every one else said—very little of what *they* knew. Personally they only remembered going to Signorina Vespucci to get the character of a servant, and then saw Cristoforo and were told he was the child of an English gentleman named Giuseppe Vancè, and that his mother had died shortly after his birth. When Violet mentioned your name incidentally they asked if that was the Mr. Vancè who lost his wife so sadly. Violet of course misunderstood this, but her mistake was cleared up when they spoke about 'your baby' that they had seen up at Fiesole. She did not hear anything else at the time; but Mrs. Pettigrew said she knew where the girl was whom they had gone to ask about. She had stayed a year with them, and then went to some friends, where she was still cameriera. She was a very nice truthful girl and might be relied upon. Vi and I found her, and made her tell us all she could recollect, which seemed quite straightforward. She had never seen Cristoforo's mother, nor his father except once, when he came back after his wife's death, having been called away on business some time before his baby was born. She described you very closely, so as to convince us she was speaking truly. But she could tell us nothing about your wife, and sent us for more information to the priorè, to whom we went. He was new to the place, but he referred us to his predecessor. I wrote to him asking him to tell us all he knew. I need not write this—you will know that he would be accurate. But he gave us the name of the place you were married in, saying he thought we had better see the priorè there, which we did. We heard from him that he recollected your wedding quite clearly—and who were your 'testimone,' as he called them. He said they did not have many runaway matches between forestieri and Italian girls in his little out of the way village—he was sure there was nothing disreputable about the business. The girl had lived in the place for a fortnight before the wedding at a casa of monachè, and you had stayed at the albergo. He gave your name quite correctly.

"It all seems like a dreadful dream. It must be what I supposed—the girl *must* have fallen in love with you, and threatened to kill herself, or something of that sort. She was an Italian, and their girls are not like ours. Do write, dear Joe, and tell me it was this. It *must* have been. Oh, do write something that will make me *feel* happier. It is all too terrible. But whatever it was, remember all the past is with me still, and I can never be anything to you but your affectionate sister

"LOSSIE."

"P. S. I have reopened this to say that I wrote to Madame Nissim some time since—but had no answer. So I suppose the letter never reached. What I wanted was to spare you from hearing more than you needed, and so I asked her to tell me what she knew without worrying you about it.

"Since I fastened up the letter I have been letting myself hope a little—that you will be able to say something to make things easier to bear. If you had only not concealed—it would have been different. I wake in the glorious morning light here, and know before I wake that some dark thing I have forgotten is waiting to come over me like a cloud. And the children ask me what is the long, long letter I am writing to Uncle Joe, and I cannot tell them."

That was the end. I saw that no answer was possible, and that now Lossie Thorpe, whom I had clung to through all my troubles of boyhood and manhood; through her marriage and mine; she whom the wife I loved so dearly loved too, as I did—was gone. Gone out of my life as surely as Janey herself was gone. Gone for ever, except there be, as I said to myself there needs must be (else the absurdity of it all!), some life to come where sight is clear—where no counter stroke of Love or Hate, or speech misunderstood, can overthrow the structure of a soul, or make the light of heaven shine in vain. That life would come; it might well be. But in the meanwhile I must tread my path alone.

For I saw that Lossie had shut her eyes to the fact that I had not only concealed but denied the thing I seemed so clearly convicted of. She had certainly received my letter of November or how could she have written to la Faustina? But to write a challenge to so plain a denial of paternity, on its merits, would have left no loophole for reconciliation. Whereas, to accept it as part of the machinery of concealment left it included in the blame for that concealment, and ignored its seeming a deliberate lie. Had I not better have told a lie, and pleaded guilty to what I had not done? Quite impossible! I never could have sustained the part.

There was no way out now except the truth. Oh, for the right to speak the truth, and get Lossie back! A coward's thought, in all conscience! To get Lossie back, at the cost of shifting the weight off my heart onto hers!

"No," I said to myself, "if I die with the pain of it, I will be silent! Lossie must think ill of her other little brother for a while—just for the rest of the time!—but she shall never know from him what that brother of her own was. Every pang I have to face in the days to come will be fraught with its own word of solace—'This is for Lossie'—and the thought will be mine that she is spared a greater sorrow than the one that is borne by me, that I do not shrink from for her sake."

So, the letter ended all. And my heart died down as I thought of the days I had before me. But I made my boy, who was the son of the cause of it all, come to me and give me consolation. And I think if it had not been for Toforino's voice, that surely was his mother's, and his eyes and his locks, that were none of his father's, as I could see, my heart would have broken outright. But I lived for my boy, and threw myself into my work and all its dangers and excitement. And fifteen years passed, and things chanced as I have told you and brought me here.

CHAPTER LIV

THE TALE IS TOLD. A FEW RECOLLECTIONS OF FOLK SEEN IN LONDON. OF NOLLY, OF HICKMAN, OF PRING, OF LADY TOWERSTAIRS. AND OF POOR OLD CAPSTICK, IN A MADHOUSE! WHEN HE HAS LOOKED THROUGH THE LETTERS AGAIN, HE WILL BURN THE WHOLE LOT; BUT——! A LONG LETTER OF LOSSIE'S TO SARITA SPENCER. FINIS.

AND now I am at the end of my story—the story I set out to tell. I have gone through my early life again—the life I had tried to forget; and I have found how impracticable real oblivion is, for each phase of memory has revived another. Am I glad or sorry to have got to '*finis*'? I do not know; it has been both pleasure and pain. I will not write the word—at least, not yet. There are still some late letters of Lossie's that I have glanced at enough to see that they contain nothing of great interest. But a closer examination may detect something. *Finis* may stand over, at least till I am packing up to go back to my boy. He will be thinking I am never coming back—but there!—the time has slipped away by instalments. Six months has become near two years. A few weeks will be the utmost now. I shall be glad to be back.

For I have not had a comfortable two years. I have been in constant fear of meeting some old friend to whom I should have had to tell lies to account for my disappearance. Nolly in Lincoln's Inn Fields is much too near; but then he lives at Sydenham, and his London beat is almost limited to the streets between the Fields and the Temple. There are not many others who would recognize me, but there are a few. For instance, a very important-looking gentleman whom I saw in Walbrook. I could not think who it was at first; then I remembered Hickman, my Father's partner. Had he seen me he might have remembered me. Probably I should have got off easily, without much "prequivocation." But how can I tell? Then I was recognized on a fine Saturday evening on the Bridge in St. James's Park by a man who was drunk, and was pretending to be sober. It was my old friend Pring, who, in spite of the slightness of our interview, managed to keep up his old character for contradictiousness. "You're not Mr. Vansh," said he, with confidence. I said: "Very well, Pring, just as you like. I'm not." On which he changed his ground, and said, "I sheed it was you." Then he took umbrage at a person unknown who had questioned his consistency, and became loud and oratorical. "I sheed Mr. Vansh minute I came onsh bridge. Shed show! *Heard* me say it," and then asked who the unknown was, as well he might. He repeated the question with asperity. "Who are you shezidin't—liar yourself!" until I was obliged to accept the fiction, and assure him that the unknown was an inferior person, not worth his notice. This appeased Pring, who then called him a something young haberdasher. The remainder of our conversation was conjectural, as to what Pring said to me, but it seemed to be an indictment of Mr. McGaskin for stealing "our" invention. "What invention?" said I. "Shiprockater," said Pring. Oh, how nearly I had forgotten the great Engine! I gave Pring a sovereign, as he was out of work, and parted from him with a mind at ease. But suppose I had met some one who was pretending to be drunk and was really sober—how then?

The person I was most afraid of meeting was Jeannie Macallister. My fear kept me away from West End Streets with shops where ladies from Perthshire would go marketing in their London season. But I had quite made up my mind, in case the sort of thing it pictured should come to pass, what course I should pursue. If, for instance, she should suddenly recognize me from a carriage-full of daughters in the street, and call after me, I would not run—not I! I would face the music—go home with her—take her, force her into my confidence, and beg her, in the name of her dead husband and our old friendship, to say no word to any living soul. It would be the only chance—for as to half telling a tale to Jeannie, or hoodwinking her in any way—that wouldn't work! Had Lossie resembled Jeannie in her keen dramatic sympathy and insight into human life, she would have found the whole story out long ago. Fancy Jeannie in Florence with the clues Lossie had! But the two women are quite unlike in the way they see into character. Lossie sees and distinguishes truth and falsehood instantly—but not men's motives and actions and passions.

There is one person whom I have seen once at a concert, and do not care to see again. For though I met Lady Towerstairs face to face in the lobby going away, she looked me in the eyes very stonily; and yet I did not feel at all sure she did not know me quite well. How I can imagine her saying to her sister: "I saw your Joe Vance, dear, in town last season. He seems to be enjoying himself in London. I thought he had gone to Patagonia or somewhere." And then I can fancy Lossie trying to get some more information, and not succeeding. However, she may not have recognized me, as to say the truth I did not really recognize her by her appearance. What made me identify her was probably the beautiful girl I saw beside her whom I suppose now to have been her niece, Nolly's daughter, of whose extraordinary resemblance to her aunt, Lady Desprez, I had often heard while I was still in correspondence with the latter and she herself was yet a child. I was coming out through the entry at St. James's Hall, where toffs and mortals jostle each other and never know it, when I saw in a mirror in front of me, following my own image, two visions of beauty whom nature and art had done their best for, who seemed to be, so far as the former went, the Lossie and Violet that I saw married more than twenty-five years ago. Behind them was a palpable mother of one or both, and around them males in bondage. I glanced at the reflected group, and I hope did not look as I felt, like a man struck dumb with a sudden incomprehensible surprise. But the girls' reflections did look startled, and the mother fixed me with a look that either did not know me, or pretended not to. I saw that it was Violet, and that her good looks had not forsaken her. I got into the street and was glad.

I think that exhausts all my encounters with early recollections in my two years of British Museum research and historical scribbling.

No! Stop a minute! I had just one other. I had been to see a poor insane fellow at the Asylum to which his friends had removed him. He had been a reader at the Museum with whom I had had some acquaintance, but I had noticed nothing wrong about him. No one was more surprised than I when one day he went raving mad, and had to be removed. Hearing afterwards that he had recovered his reason, but that he was not considered safe to leave the Asylum, I went over to see him, and found him to all appearance quite himself. So much so that he was taking a good deal of interest in the other patients, and told me he was thinking out a novel, the events of which would take place entirely in a madhouse. He described some of the cases he had seen that he meant to introduce—among them a clergyman who had gone stark mad over predestination and Prevenient Grace. "He talks to himself all day long," said my friend, "and with a sort of coherence. He gets into logical fixes about the duty of sin, in order that the Lord shall pardon the Sin and Grace shall abound.

But then every right action is an opportunity lost, and it is obviously sinful to do it. But if it is sinful to do it, clearly that is an occasion for Grace, and it is right to do it on that account. So it's right to do a thing because it's wrong, and therefore wrong to do the same thing because it's right."

"Nothing can be clearer," said I, but I remembered the phrases, and thought I should like to see any one who reminded me of my early youth. And my friend took me through the asylum, where he seemed to be under little restraint; and there, walking in the garden, incessantly talking to himself, over and over the same thing, was a little, bent old man with the manner of a preacher. Every now and then he would throw out his hands in a kind of despair and then bury his face in them, shaking his head as he did so. And guided by the clue given me, I could see that he was the Rev. Benaiah Capstick.

This going back into the past has been a very strange experience. My impression, now that I come to the end of it, is that it has absorbed me more than I had meant it should. My idea was to make a summary of the main facts of my early life. No sooner had I taken up my pen than I suddenly remembered that my Father and Mother had been emphatic about that beer. And that made me remember more, and so throughout the whole story.

What shall I do with it now that it is written? My feeling is in favour of destroying it But that seems so illogical! A more reasonable course would be to make a parcel of it and leave it for my boy to read after I have "got free," as Dr. Thorpe used to phrase it. The only possible reason against this would be if there was the legal flaw in his mother's marriage, and I have gathered since that this may have been the case. But my narrative shows (to my thinking) that even if this was so, his mother was the innocent victim of diabolism supported by officialism. As for the character of his father, that won't trouble Cristoforo. In fact, I think he regards his parent as a mere meddler—an interloper before the fact—just as my dear Daddy looked upon C. Dance, the former owner of the celebrated board. *I* am Toforino's *babbo;* and at the most Beppino's claims upon him could only be for a mere civility—rather an officious one, quite unsolicited by himself. No! I don't mind his reading every word of it, after I am gone.

If there were any likelihood of his getting into touch with his English relatives I should burn it. Because then they too would be almost sure to come to the knowledge of the whole thing. If

Lossie was dead, this wouldn't matter. But if she lives to her Aunt's age, there are still forty years to reckon with. However, I don't see any prospect of Toforino coming to live in England. He is at Harvard now. Had I wished him ever to come to England, of course I should have sent him to Oxford; he would have shown, I believe, that private tuition in Rio Grande had done justice to his abilities. But I thought England dangerous.

I have still a painful task before me with all those old letters. It wouldn't do to burn them without making sure of their contents. When I have done that, and arranged about the publication of "Music and Mechanism," as I have settled to call my work, I will if possible draw those other two games against Herr Pfleiderer, and bid a last farewell to my native fogs.

When I laid down my pen two days since I did not think ever to add a word to the above. I find myself obliged to do so, having completely missed or overlooked a letter of Lossie's. I cannot the least account for my having done so. Need I account for it? The fact remains, and the letter remains. How I felt on reading it may be imagined—if any one ever reads it. If it be you, Cristoforo, that reads, I ask you to pardon me that I have not copied it out, as I did previous letters. It must remain in the parcel, to be lost, forgotten, recovered, just as may be, when I am lost to the material world; forgotten by those I knew on it; recovered, it may be, by a wife that awaits me.

It is a letter written immediately after her final letter to me, and it must have reached my sister-in-law in her last illness. It is even possible that she never read it, and was spared the pain of knowing (or rather believing) me capable of forgetting her sister in less than a year, and consoling myself for her loss with an act of treachery to another woman. It does not matter, it is all done and over now, fifteen, twenty years ago! Here is the letter:

"VILLA MAGONCINI, FIESOLE, 12 February, 1881.

"MY DEAREST SARRY: I am quite broken-hearted over a big trouble, and you will have to share it and be heart-broken too. Because it's Janey's husband—my dear other little brother that was—and I can hardly help calling him dear still, for all this nightmare that has come upon us. It *is* a nightmare! the thought that all that time when we were in London and it was such a pleasure to me to see what friends he and my darling Hugh had become—all that time that he seemed to be bearing his loss so bravely, and used to talk of all Papa's ideas, and his own great hope of seeing Janey again—that all that very time he was married *to an Italian wife!!* whom he had left to herself after a few weeks of marriage, expecting a baby—this boy Cristoforo, whom he pretended to 'adopt' after her death. I cannot quite make out how long it was before he deserted her in this way, because it comes down to a matter of memory in which I have no one to help me but the children—but it must have been very soon. Violet believes, or says she believes, that the marriage was an invalid one, and either that the girl was entrapped into it, or that both knew the ceremony was a farce, and went through it to save their faces. Because it seems that in Italy girls are constantly married in churches and disowned because there has not been a *municipio* celebration also. It seems incredible that a contract accepted by a girl (who *is* in earnest), because she believes the man in earnest, should be disallowed by the state on so shallow a pretext—but there! in this marriage business the weaker party seems always to be made the victim of a conspiracy of fools and devils. However, I can't believe it was this, whatever Violet may say. My own belief is the girl fell in love with him and told him so, and he married her from Quixotism. But why did he not tell me? and why did he deny it when I wrote first to him?

"But I am running wild in my letter and not telling you the story itself, dear! I will make amends by *writing it out long,* as we used when we were schoolgirls. My letters lately have got shorter and shorter. I've been so sorry—but couldn't help it!!

"You know how in the year after Janey's death, in the autumn, Joe Vance and my dear Beppino came to Italy. I can't fix dates at this length of time, but I know they parted at Milan, and Beppino went travelling about. I don't know where Joe Vance went—but there are several people in Florence who remember that the Signore Giuseppe Vancè was here at that time, though they don't agree in their description of him. At the Hotel Minerva there is some story (which I am sure is nonsense) about his wanting to be called by another name than the one painted on his boxes. Violet will believe anything against Joe—so she pretends to believe this. The only thing I can make sure of is that he was here sometime—and I must be mistaken in my recollection of how soon he came back to London. Things have been very misty in my memory since my darling Hugh was taken from me.

"I think I'm right though that I wrote to you at the time all about how Joe came back from his second visit to Italy, after my dear Beppino died, and told me he had adopted an Italian baby, both of whose parents were dead, because the child had the name of Cristoforo (old Mr. Vance was Christopher) and he 'seemed in want of a caretaker.' Oh, how incredible it all seems! But you will hear. After that we bought the Sorrento Villa, and for two years never really made a stay in Florence—only had a flying visit or two, and just saw sights—so I had no chance to hunt out this baby, as I should have done had there been time. Then Joe sent for it out to Brazil, and when he did this I began to fear he would end by remaining there. And so he has—for the six months it was to be at first has got lengthened out and lengthened out. But he has constantly written about the boy, telling of his beauty and cleverness (for we have been constantly writing), and then that he had entered on some new work that would detain him another six months—and so on. I do *not* believe that what I have to tell you had any share in producing these delays. He had always talked so freely of his adopted son, that I cannot see that he could have had any object in remaining out, except what he said. Had he wanted to conceal him—however, it is no use speculating. I will tell you just what has happened.

"Until we came here I had never heard a hint or suggestion that this boy Cristoforo was Joe's own son. When Violet and her husband came out to us at vintage-time last year, she heard some gossip to that effect which she thought she was bound to repeat to me. I suppose she was. Anyhow, she repeated it—rather maliciously, I thought—but *you* know Vi! I resented the idea as impossible, pointing out that the child was born in Fiesole (I remember when Joe came out) not more than a year and a half after Janey's death—less, I think. The whole thing seemed perfectly ridiculous. Recollecting as I did how broken-down my poor boy (for I can't help thinking and writing of him so) seemed when he came home alone after that terrible catastrophe, I got very angry with Vi, reproached her for listening to tattle, and for being unfeeling in passing such rubbish on to me.

"'Very well, dear!' said she—and you know her irritating way of saying *n*ear instead of *d*ear when she's patronizing—'Very well, near! If you're going to make a scene about it, have it your own way! *I* won't say anything. I merely repeated to you what people were saying. If you like these things to be said, and know nothing about them, by all means do so. I know nothing about your Joe Vance and never did, and don't want my head snapped off about him.' And then she went to sit in the loggia, and left me crying, and then when I went out and begged her pardon for calling her unfeeling and kissed her, she refused at first to tell me any more, saying it was no concern of hers, and she didn't want to be mixed up in other people's affairs, and always made a point of keeping out of them. But she had made an exception this once, for my sake, and paid the penalty. No! she didn't want to talk any more about it, and I couldn't expect her to. However, I knew she would if I let her alone, and she did.

"'I suppose, dear,' said she, half-an-hour after, 'you think Constantia Seth-Pettigrew an untruthful person. But she isn't, for one thing; and for another it doesn't matter whether she is or isn't. It's not what SHE says, but what every one says. Of course she was living up at Fiesole at the time, so she couldn't very well be mistaken.' I asked what time, and she answered very pat, 'November, seventy-three, if you want to know,' as if she had got the whole particulars. And she went on to say that 'My Joe Vance and his wife, or whatever he called her,' were up there, and that Mr. and Mrs. Seth-Pettigrew had seen them about a servant. 'Of course they thought they were married,' she added. 'If they hadn't Constantia would have asked for a written character for the girl.'

"I am giving more details than I need, or you will think so. Of course Mrs. Seth-Pettigrew's convulsive purity has nothing to do with the matter—however, I had better go straight on. I couldn't recall the time clearly enough to find flaws in Violet's story. But I thought Joe (if it was Joe) must have had a very short allowance of his wife 'or whatever she was'; and I said something to this effect.

"'You don't understand men, Lossie dear,' said Violet, with equable superciliousness and the nasal tone. 'Women that marry model husbands never do. Men don't *want* a very long allowance. When I say men, I mean men; I don't mean Angels.'

"When Vi talks like this it always makes me feel ill. I tried to keep my temper with her.

"'You mean you think I thought my dear husband an Angel. I think I did, almost. But I thought Joe a very, very good man; without being an Angel, quite good enough for this story to be a ridiculous falsehood.'

"'Very well, dear! just as you please. You can ask Constantia yourself. Only I hope you won't go with a solemn face looking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, and talk as if it was an awful sin for a man to have a *liaison,* because it's only what happens every day in our class; and you'll frighten Constantia and put her off telling you if you shed tears and make scenes.'

"'Violet,' I said, 'I don't mean to let you make me angry.

You know perfectly well that what I should think so shocking in this, if it were true (which I don't believe), wouldn't be the immorality—goodness knows one sees plenty of that in India! But it's following so quick on such a terrible loss—and above all his concealing it from me. Remember how I loved and trusted him, all our lives, and believed in his affection for Janey—and *then* that he should be *able* to love this girl.'

"'My dear Loss,' said Violet, in her most offensive manner, 'you really are a downright primrose! And after all your Indian experience! As if Love and Affection had anything to do with one another!' I did not answer.

"I wrote at once to Joe at Rio Grande repeating the story, but making as light as I could of it. . . .*

"Violet says this answer of Joe's is evasive, and is worded so as to leave it open to him to say he never denied it outright. I think otherwise. If Joe wanted to produce a false impression he would tell an honest lie, without shuffling. I took it to be an *absolute* denial.

"I did not write to Joe again immediately. I wrote to Signora Nissim on the chance of her getting a letter directed to Rio Grande (only with no other address), asking her to tell me all she knew, but say nothing to Joe, as it would annoy him, if she could do without speaking to him. I have got no answer to this letter at all. But I could not have had one, in any case, before my next letter to Joe.

"As soon as Mrs. Seth-Pettigrew came home we called to see her, and I found she seemed to know much less about the matter than Violet had made out. But she suggested that we should get at Maria Zini, the girl who had been a servant in the house Joe and this girl appear to have occupied at Fiesole. She kindly found her, and sent her to us. I will write exactly our interview, and you shall judge for yourself. After thanking her for coming, I said I wanted her to tell me all she could remember of the Signore Giuseppe Vancè when they were together. 'Mai ho visto loro insieme,' said she—but perhaps I had better translate her for you. 'I never saw them together. I was only there a few days before the Signoro came back, after the Signora's death—a long time, and I was *licenziata* (dismissed) next day after that for breaking two coffee cups. I would have paid for them myself, but the Signorina Vespucci was *rabbiata* (enraged).'

---

* What follows is merely Lady Desprez's letter on **page 497, with Mr. Vance's** reply on page 499.—Ed.

"*I.*—'But you saw the Signore Vancè when he returned?'

"*She.*—'Sicuro! he stayed to pranzo, and the priorè was there—they talked about the child—the Signore said it was molto carino.'

"*Vi.*—'Can't she remember anything they said at dinner?' for Violet couldn't speak much Italian and I had to interpret.

"*She.*—'I can't remember much at dinner—I had to give my attention to the servizio. But when the Signorè went away—he had the baby in his arms, kissing it: he said: "Remember, dear Signorina, I will do my duty as a father to Cristoforo: and though the name of his grandfather was chosen for him without consulting me, I am ben contento that he should bear it. Because I was very fond of my Father." But just then I turned the vassoio a little to one side and the coffee cups slipped and the Signorina was rabbiata. It was only quattro soldi——'

"*Vi.*—'Show her Joe Vance's portrait. Where's the photograph album?'

"*I.*—'Is that like the Signore?' It was the last portrait of Joe, in a uniform of some corps he belongs to.

"*She.*—'I couldn't say for certain. It looks older and darker. Besides, the Signore was dressed borghesè.' That is to say, in mufti.

"*I.*—'Is this one like him?' I pointed to a photo of Nolly, alongside one of Joe, taken six years ago in London.

"*She.*—'Not the least! But *that* one is preciso, preciso!' pointing to Joe's.

"*Vi.*—'I hope you're convinced *now*, Lossie dear!'

"I am afraid I *was* convinced. But I was determined to leave no stone unturned before writing again to Joe. So I sought out the priorè, only unluckily he was not the same. The priorè Grimaldi, his predecessor, had gone to Sardinia, to a very out-of-the-way place. But he could write any enquiry. I asked him to find from Padrè Grimaldi what he could, but specially the name of the wife and when the marriage took place. In course of a fortnight we heard that the marriage had been at Gualdo Tadino near Foligno. The other information only confirmed what we already knew.

"I was very unwell when this came. I had had a slight attack of pleurisy, resulting from a chill, and the doctors said I should kill myself if I went out in the cold wind and hot sun. But I fidgeted so to hear more about this marriage at Gualdo Tadino (for the letter said the priorè there would be sure to remember it—he was there at the time) that Vi, who is always good-natured about *doing* anything (though she has her faults) offered to go over to Gualdo to see him and hear what she could. She did this, and he remembered the affair perfectly. To confirm his words he showed Vi the register of marriages in the Church, and there was no possible doubt about it—Giuseppe Vancè and Annunciatina Vespucci—November 9, 1873. And he also showed her a letter he had from Joe Vance about some matter relating to the wedding.

"You may fancy, dear Sarry, how ill and nervous I was when they came back, when I tell you that I disbelieved Vi when she told me this, and said so. I had got all together over-excited and feverish. Vi only said, 'Well—you can ask Dick—he was there too.' And she called him up to my room. '*You* saw the books with the entries, Dick?' said she. 'Oh, yes,' said he, 'I saw the *books* fast enough.' And then Vi hustled him out of the room because he smelt of smoke. And I had the fidgets for hours because he didn't absolutely say, he had read the entries or seen the letter. But I saw when I came to myself, that there was no loophole to get out at. For there could be no other Joseph Vance. . . ."*

---

* The remainder of the letter has no interest in connection with Mr. Vance's narrative.

FINIS

NOTE BY THE EDITOR

THE bulky MS. of which the foregoing forms part came into the possession of Mr. F—— of Kensington under the circumstances which he describes in the following letter:

23 Dec., 1900.

"DEAR SIRS: The MS. (which I forward to-day) is no doubt much too bulky to publish as it stands, but of course you have *carte-blanche* to use it as you like. So long as I can recoup myself for the expense and trouble I have had I shall be satisfied.

"It is in my possession owing to a mere accident, and I think I have hunted about for the owner quite enough to justify my selling it to pay expenses. It was through my happening to notice a fragment of a letter to one J. Vance Esq., that had been used to wrap up a piece of dry bread I had bought for drawing, on my way to my Studio. It struck me as well as my wife, to whom I showed it, that it was one the receiver would probably have destroyed or kept—certainly not one he would have wished to lie about. I showed it to the woman at the Baker's shop, and she agreed that this was so. She remembered that a former servant had spoken of Mr. Joseph Vance, whom she waited on in his chambers at her last place. It was near Russell Square; she had forgotten the address. I asked her to enquire and let me know;—she said she could probably find the girl again. I called a few days after, and she had found it out.

"It was at . . . ., but should you print this letter I will ask you to omit it, as annoyance might be caused.

"I called at the address with my wife, expecting to find Mr. Joseph Vance, but he had left two years ago. The landlady of the house (which is let in chambers) was very disobliging and ill-tempered, almost refusing to answer questions. But we got from her this much, that Mr. Vance had lived in the house between two and three years; that he wrote a good deal; might have been any age; took the rooms with attendance, and the young person, whom she called a 'young slut,' could tell us a great deal more about him than she herself could, as she waited on him every day. However, she became a little more communicative when she remembered a grievance she had against Mr. Vance. She had asked him not to burn papers in the clean black-leaded grates, and he had begged leave to do so in the kitchen. A big parcel he put on the fire had flared up and set the kitchen chimney on fire, and she had to pay a fine, as it had not been swept. She was very angry with Mr. Vance about this; admitting, however, that Mr. Vance's sister had spoken civil about it when she came, and that all her expenses had been paid. We asked whether no address had been left and she said there was a foreign address, but she had lost it. When they went away Mr. Vance's sister said something about Italy. Our informant refused to take charge of any letters for Mr. Vance—in fact, was very unaccommodating.

"We tried to find the 'young slut,' but were unfortunate also in this. In the short interim between our enquiries she had left the place she was in and apparently disappeared altogether. It was supposed she had got employment at a theatre.

"About six months after this I was in want of a model with a good pair of arms, and one was sent to me by my friend . . . Her arms were very fine, and I had a great many sittings. She of course talked incessantly in the silly way models have, and I only threw in a word or two now and then. I occasionally listened, when the stories she told grew extra silly, in order to amuse my wife with them. One such story was to the effect that she had been a sort of lady-help once in a house where there was an author. This gentleman had made a big parcel of a lot of 'littery rubbish' and she had taken this rubbish out of the parcel, substituting the same bulk of paper. I asked her motive for doing this, and she gave me the very unsatisfactory reason that she did it to see what an old Cure the writer would look when he found the *Daily Telegraft* folded close instead of his precious rubbish. Of course she meant to give it back. 'It was,' she said, 'all along of the old Cure himself she didn't.' It seemed that he, shortly before leaving the house 'where he had been staying,' had put the parcel containing (as he supposed) his writings on the kitchen fire 'not to mess the clean grates in the sitting-rooms.' Then she couldn't 'find the cheek' to tell him of the trick she had intended, before he went away with his sister.

"It was odd that I did not at once recognize the story. I was perhaps thrown off my guard by the image of the 'lady-help' and the gentleman who 'stayed in the house'—a different *entourage*. When I repeated the tale to my wife she at once said: 'Why, what a goose you are! Of course your model is the "young slut."' Of course she was, and I should never have found it out!

"I thought it much better that the papers, whatever they were, should be in my keeping than the young woman's. So I offered to purchase the MS. of her, and after seeing it thought I might speculate to the extent of two pounds, which she accepted. As Messrs. . . . . have kindly offered to cover this expense and others incurred in advertising, and have undertaken all responsibilities in case it turns out a genuine narrative, containing names of living people, I have no hesitation in leaving it in their hands. I think I may, however, fairly ask for a presentation copy in case of publication. I am, dear Sir,

"Yours, etc.

"I enclose the address of Miss Constantine the model, should you desire further information from her."

Having undertaken to prepare this MS. for the Press, after necessary curtailment, I decided to find out "Miss Constantine," whom I recognized as the "Betsy Austin" of the narrative, and to get her to tell me more of Mr. Vance, as there was no doubt she could do. In this I was not mistaken. She became very communicative, and the following is, in a condensed form, what she told me in one or two interviews.

She had attended on or "done for" Mr. Vance during the whole of his stay on "Skinnerses first floor." He was a quiet sort of oldish gentleman, who conducted himself which a many didn't. He was particular, "but so might you have been," about his bath-water and emptyin' regular. Used to go for walks after dark. Always gave money to organs if Italian and Piedmonteses with guinea-pigs that died when instructed to it. Very fond of chess and used to have a German round to play and often three in the morning in consequence. She had taken notes to the German often and often, and was sure of his name and address, which she gave. She quite admitted she did wrong in abstracting the MS., but it was only a practical joke in the way of describing it, and not intended to convey malice. What was his sister like? Like him? No, not a bit—a handsome old lady—not so very old, neither. A lock of gray hair—grayish hair—loose on her forehead. Came in a hansom the first time—next in a carriage. She showed her up the first time—she drove up to the next house and knocked and rang, "and I was out in front and heard her ask for Mr. Vance. So says I he lives here—first floor. Should I take her card up?" "Oh no," says she, "Mr. Vance's sister," and she just passed me by introducively, and says, "Show me his door." I told her him and Mr. Pfleiderer was a-playing chess; and she says "Never mind," and goes straight in. What did she say exactly? I'll tell you. She said never a word, but stood giving little gasps like as if the words wouldn't come. Herr Pfleiderer he didn't hear her—he'd his back to her, and he sat looking at the Prawns and Rooks—rubbishin' nonsense—for grown men to sit playin' at. What did Mr. Vance say? I'll tell you. He started up and called out something I failed to notice, and Herr Pfleiderer he looks up and says, "No—you have a goot game—but I shall give you a check at Queen Square." Then Mr. Vance came running round to the lady, just in time to catch her. Oh yes, she'd very nearly fell! and she'd seemed that strong too, coming up the stairs. And the Herr he says "Harsharsh—vat is dat?" Then Mr. Vance says quite self-contained like, "We'll finish our game another time, Pfleiderer. It's my sister." And the Herr he says, "I will take my leaf."

There was a little hesitation in Miss Constantine's manner at this point of the story, due to her reluctance to admit that after seeing Mr. Pfleiderer out she had returned and listened at the keyhole. When once she had yielded the point she became communicative again, and even infused a certain amount of dramatic force into her narrative of what she heard, as she warmed to her subject.

"She was a-crying!" said she. "Oh, cryin' she was! And it was 'Oh, my dear Joe—my poor Joe—Oh, to think of it! All these years—these years.' And there was Mr. Vance—crying?—Oh no, he wasn't crying—you could hear he wasn't—only when he spoke it was just as good! Only not giving away. He wasn't that sort. He held to, and kep' it in. But cried she *did!* no mistake."

"What did Mr. Vance say?"

"'It was for you, dear love, it was for you.' That's what he kept on saying. 'How could I bear for you to know about poor little Becky.' I *think* it was Becky he said. Then she cried more. Then they went down quieter, and he says, 'How came you to find out?' And she says, 'In Hugh's old satchel—we opened the lining.' And Mr. Vance he says, 'My God!' and then old Skinner comes screeching up the stairs for me, and I had to go, and that was all I heard. I showed the lady out later, and the hansom had stood there all the while, and it must have mounted up. The lady she looked quieter, and said drive to Mivart's. Oh yes, Mr. Vance he came down too and said he ought to go with her, and she said nonsense!

"Next day Mr. Vance he gave notice,—he had it by the three months—any quarter day; and Skinner had correspondin' bad temper. And it was then she caught him up short for going to throw a burning letter in the clean grate. So Mr. Vance he says, 'Now, Mrs. Skinner, suppose you be an amiable party and let me burn all my rubbish in your kitchener. It 'll go twiced as quick.' And she agreed, being smoothed over like. And then Mr. Vance he gets out the bundle with the old paper on it, and wrote on 'An Ill-written Autobiography'—but with nothing in it but so much *Daily Telegraft*—and brings it down and shoves it under the lid of the kitchener, there being no roasting and it wouldn't burn, not till the string broke,—then Skinner she stirred the poker in through the front bars, and flittered the leaves about. And it made a big blaze and set the sut alight in the flue, and the engines came. But it was Skinners's own fault. What did Mr. Vance say? 'Catch hold of the rug, Betsy Austin.' And him and me held it acrost for to stop the drarve. And Skinner she stood and used many expressions till the Engines knocked and she went upstairs for to deny 'em. But their helmets carried that weight that Skinner she was demolished like, and gave in."

Miss Constantine meant to have her talk out about the fire, and had it. I thought it best to allow it, but I need not print the whole. I may mention, however, that Mr. Vance recognized the head fireman as having been in his service more than twenty years before. This exasperated Mrs. Skinner, as it led to Mr. Vance taking him up into his room, and talking to him for some time, and keeping the engine in attendance, "and boys climbing up the area railings." Miss C. having exhausted this story, went on to the second visit of Mr. Vance's sister, admitting that when she showed her in, she promptly listened at the keyhole, as before.

"Skinner was out, and Upstairs was typewriting audible. Leaving off would have been notice, and I should have heard the street door. What did I hear them say? Nothing at first. They just went on, talking, talking—in very low voices. Oh no! they never thought any one was listening. It was the subject-matter of their conversation—they dropped their voices down to it—as a serious tone. Then they got on to a winding-up quickness, like concluding off, when the piece is ending, and their voices rose proportionate.

"'You *must*, dear old boy,' says she, 'you really must. It's the only way you can give me any chance of making it up to you.' And then she breaks out, betrayin' emotion. 'Oh, my dear, my dear, when I think of you alone all these years——' And I gathered, from notice taken, that she was cryin' over him substantial. What did he say? 'I had the boy, darling Lossie, I had the boy.' 'Yes, dear fellow,' says she, 'and Bett's boy after all!' I think it was Bett, not Becky. 'Ah,' says he, 'but you should see my boy. He shall go to Oxford now. Not but Hertford's very good for him—but I should like Bailey,' and then they talked again, undertone, but I could hear it was about Janey. Nothing but Janey, Janey, Janey—— Then Mr. Vance give out suddenly, crying like any little girl. 'Oh no, Loss dear,' says he, 'do talk about her—it does me good.' And then I had to go down and open the door, and it was a mistake. Only they wanted to know—the mistake—where was the Ophthalmic Insurance Society. And it took me ever so long to direct—and when I got back upstairs I could hear the conversation concluding off. Oh yes, I heard some more! She said, 'You'll see one of my letters will turn up in time.'—'How did you direct exactly?' says he. 'Simply "Joseph Vance, Esq.," at the old address,' says she. 'And then as soon as I was well enough I started to come.'—'We might find them in the Dead Letter Office,' says Mr. Vance, 'but they wouldn't do *us* any good.' And then they came out, and she says, 'Now you must come over to Molly. So mind you're ready at nine to-morrow when I come.' And next day sure enough she came in a carriage, and she and Mr. Vance and one or two trunks went away to Victoria, and that was the last of them I see. Pleased as Punch they looked."

This appeared to be all the information I could get from Miss Constantine. I determined next to apply to Herr Dr. Ludwig Pfleiderer at the address she had given me. I can give the substance of his information without repeating his exact words. He met Mr. Vance a year ago at Simpson's chess-rooms, and had played a good many games with him in his own house, but more at Mr. Vance's rooms. Mr. V. was very retired, always asking to come alone if possible, as he really disliked Society in every form. Mr. V. had given a general account of himself corresponding with that in the narrative, but had mentioned no names of friends. Dr. Pfleiderer had noticed this as peculiar; but he went to Mr. V.'s rooms to play chess, not to pry into his private affairs. Mr. V. was always going to Brazil next month, but was always detained by some new document turning up at the British Museum, which he felt bound to examine carefully. He was always very anxious to get letters from an adopted son of his who was at Harvard. Asked why the boy should not go to Oxford or Cambridge, as then he would have him near him, and he could remain longer in England, Mr. V. said the boy had relations in England he did not wish him to make acquaintance with. Was it a family quarrel? No, there was no quarrel—but they were on an unusual footing. So Dr. Pfleiderer asked no more questions.

I asked about the lady who came when the game of chess was going on. I will give Dr. P.'s verbal description of this.

"Aha!" said he, "that was a very funny incident! I was considering my move, and did not hear the door open. Suddenly Mr. Vance started up and shouted out 'Lost!'—at least that was what I thought he said at the time. I looked up and said his game was not lost at all—far from it—and then I saw his eyes fixed on some one behind me, and I turned round and saw a very handsome lady; oldish woman, with slightly gray hair loose on the forehead, and a very soft sort of look about the eyes—long eyelashes—must have been a beauty thirty years ago. She was as white as this sheet of paper, and looked as if she would fall forward. Mr. Vance went round the table quickly, and just caught her in time. He got her to the sofa, and then told me it was his sister, whom he had not seen for many years, and we would finish our game another time. So, as I was in the way I said good-night.

"He called on me next day, and was very full of apologies for the way he had packed me off. He said it was perfectly impossible to give an explanation of the circumstances under which his sister had been separated from him for a very long term of years, or of those which had brought her back quite unexpectedly. But her coming had made a great change in his plans, and now instead of going to Brazil he should accompany this lady back to Florence, where she lived. 'I feel rather a humbug, Herr Doctor,' said he, 'in speaking of her as my sister. We have always thought of each other as brother and sister—but only because I was in a sense adopted into her family when I was a child of eight—half her age.' 'I see,' said I, 'you have always thought of her as a sister—quite always.' 'As a very dear sister,' said he. 'I see,' said I, 'and you will go to your very dear sister's house in Florence, and live there, and be her very dear brother.' 'Something of that sort,' said he. 'And I expect my boy will go to Oxford after all.' 'You will forgive my plain speech, Mr. Vance,' said I. 'And play a game of chess into the bargain, Herr Doctor,' said he. And we played for two hours. He opened Ruy Lopez, and beat me in fifty-four moves. It was a good game."

"Did he not say anything farther during the game?"

"Well—nothing much during the game. My wife came in and gave us tea and talked of what trouble she had in finding an address that morning. Mr. Vance said, 'Well, Mrs. Pfleiderer, I hope you didn't have so much trouble to find your friend as the lady you saw, Herr Doctor, had to find me the other day.'" And then he told us how she had come to London on a forlorn hope to find him without any clue at all except that he had been seen in Sloane Street. 'Not a soul of my own connection knew anything about me,' said he. 'All thought I was still in Brazil. Her brother was laid up with gout, and couldn't help. But by a lucky chance he remembered forwarding some goods from his Office in Lincoln's Inn Fields to a Pantechnicon, for me, years and years ago—and they managed to fish out the receipt given when the goods were sent for, and at the Pantechnicon she got my address and came straight on.'"

This was all the information to be had from Herr Pfleiderer.

There remained a chance of information as to Mr. Vance's whereabouts if one of Lady Desprez's letters could be recovered. I applied at the Central Office, and the officials were most courteous and obliging, making every possible search and enquiry, but without result.

It might appear the most obvious course to make enquiry for this lady's Villa in Florence. But there is no doubt many of the names in the narrative are changed, and Desprez undoubtedly is, as there was no General of that name killed at Candahar in '79. This is not the only name whose owner could certainly be identified if it were genuine; for instance, the name of Thorpe. The name Vance itself is rather puzzling, as even if it were not Mr. Joseph Vance's real name, it is difficult to see how Lady Desprez could direct to him under that name—a name assumed, be it noted, to ensure concealment of the bearer. But no large building firm under the name of Christopher Vance & Co. can be found in any directory. The story of the signboard makes this circumstance the more singular. The real names might certainly have been (for instance) Hobson and Jobson instead of Dance and Vance. But if the names are altered throughout it is not easy to see why Mr. Vance was so anxious to destroy the MS.

In any case the Publishers and myself may claim that we have taken every possible precaution. We have advertised not only in the English press, but in that of other countries (Italy especially), without receiving any answer. I have personally gone through a whole library of Directories of all sorts in the hope of finding some clue to some one person mentioned, but without success. The narrative is published now in the belief, on our part, that if it is, after all, a genuine one, the alteration of names is such that identification is impossible, and will remain so.

POSTSCRIPT BY THE PUBLISHERS

Just as the first edition of this work is completed in the press and ready for the binder, a most embarrassing letter has come into the Editor's possession which establishes the identity of the "Lady Desprez" of the story. We have decided, after taking legal advice, on printing this letter without the signature. It is essential to the completeness of the narrative and can in no case make matters worse than they are already. We have, however, communicated with the writer and undertaken to suppress the work if she for her part will undertake to cover expenses up to date. If no answer is received the book will issue as announced.

The letter, which the Post-Office Authorities have handed to the Editor, Mr. Howden, seems to have gone to Chelsea, Boston, U. S., nearly two years since, and remained there until recently. That it has reached us is due to the shrewdness of Mr. Notley, of St. Martin's-le-Grand, who was present when Mr. Howden made his enquiry. It struck him that the same thing might have occurred that he had known in another case—that the address Chelsea, S. W., might have been taken for Chelsea, S. U. (Stati Uniti), and the word London omitted. This was exactly what had happened, and the letter was found on application to the office at Boston.

The direction, evidently written in agitation, omits the word London, and the word Inghilterra written last is a mere blot. The whole has the appearance of having been blotted on ordinary paper, the last words suffering most. To add to this the stamps have been placed* (probably by an Italian servant) exactly on what was the word Inghilterra,—perhaps with the view of remedying the slovenly appearance.

We reprint the whole letter, only omitting the signature. For other names that are mentioned we have substituted those in the MS. that correspond.

"Villa . . . ., Florence.

"My dear, dear old Joe, is it too late? I mean is it still possible I may do something—some little thing—to make amends for all the cruel wrong I have been doing to you in these past years? Oh, my dear, if this should reach you, write, telegraph at once to tell me where you are. I would give all I have, would give all my days that are left, only to see you for one hour and speak with you and have the air clear between us as it used to be, and for you to know how miserably I could allow myself to be deceived. For, my dear, my dear, I know it all now—it has all come to me in this last twelve hours, and Hugh is not here to keep me calm and tell me what to do. I must act for myself as best I may. God grant me only to see your dear face once again—the face I had the cowardice and stupidity to think deceived me. I *ought* to have known it was *impossible,* and I was a *fool* and knew nothing.

---

* Two stamps of ten centimes and one of five.

"Writing like this is no use! I had better stop it and try to tell you everything that has happened, as nearly as I can. But I am ill, and my head swims. If it were not so I should start at once for London, for I know you *are* in London somewhere. But I can only write to your old house and hope some chance may take the letter on.

"For fifteen—no! sixteen years—God forgive me for my folly—I have believed one whom I now know to be as true a man as ever lived to have been false in word and deed—*how* I could have thought it, it bewilders me now to think! But I *was* deceived, my dear, so cruelly deceived. And now I have to purchase the chance of making some amends for my wrong to you at the cost of knowing that another brother, whose memory I was cherishing as a treasure, was one for whom I can find no name I can bear to call him by—but I must try again to begin and tell you what has happened—I mean, what has happened in this last day here. As for my excuses for the past, I cannot write them now. Oh, how I hope we shall meet that I may tell you!

"You must remember my little Cicely (the Turk, you called her). She and a young soldier, quite a boy, whom she met in the summer in London, are in love, and want me to allow them to be engaged. He has come here on a visit, and Cicely told him that I still keep Hugh's old regimentals that he had at the time of his death. He came to me yesterday asking as a great privilege that he might be allowed a sight of them—there is not a young man in the army, said he, but would think it a privilege to see and touch the garment Hugh . . . . died in. So I got it out for him, and I thank God I did so. For as I was telling him of the little satchel that you will I'm sure recollect—he stood turning it over in his hands, and put his finger through the hole the bullet made. I had never examined it so closely—it was too much pain—and had wrapped it up and put it away sixteen years ago. Young Lieutenant . . . . said there was a piece of paper inside the lining and it felt like an envelope. I thought it impossible, but told him to pull it out. I saw at once that it was a letter to the mother of your boy Cristoforo—but *not* in your handwriting!

"I opened it and saw the signature, Giuseppe Vancè. But the moment I saw 'Giuseppe' I saw it was Beppino's. And the whole thing burst suddenly on me, and I was wise too late. I fell down insensible, and am now only slowly recovering from the shock.

"Oh, my dear, I see it all plainly now—at least, I see you took Beppino's guilt upon yourself, and made his boy your own. I remember I wrote out to Sarita that I believed it must have been some Quixotism of yours. So it was, dear Joe, but it was the Quixotism of the Angels.

"How the letter came to be in Hugh's old wallet quite passes my comprehension. I could only recollect that one day at Poplar Villa that lining was torn, and Hugh had it sewn up. The letter must have been slipped inside the lining and sewn in. It was before we bought Villa . . . .—that's all I can recollect.

"As to Beppino—I dare not think—in fact, I cannot. I can see nothing now except that he writes to an Italian *wife* whose name is not Sibyl, and signs himself with an assumed surname. As to any possible mistake about who wrote that 'Giuseppe,' I have plenty of letters from him signed so. As to Sibyl, I shall tell her nothing. She had better not know. I daresay you remember that she married the Duke of . . . . within two years of Beppino's death. I always say Beppino's boy is more mine than hers now. She is so much in the world.

"I am very confused about it all—but quite clear of one thing—that Beppino deceived some girl here under your name, and you took all the blame on yourself after her death—and I did wrong to believe you. I see it more in the look of your face, as I remember it then, than by any analysis I can make of the story now. I see it all, my dear, I see it all! And I know you have never blamed me.

"I know you *are* in London because some German ladies were here last week, and when I was showing them my photos, one of them pitched upon your portrait and said she had seen you in Sloane Street just before starting to come away, but that you looked much older than when she knew you. She was a Madame Schmidt, who has been a great pianist I believe. If only her little bit of information leads to your receiving this, how glad I shall be!

"Dear, dear other little brother, if this letter reaches you and we never meet, as may be, try and think of our past as though it had ended in those last days at . . . . Never think of all these dreary years of darkness and misunderstanding. If only we might all have died then—while the world was still sweet to us and life seemed good! As it now is, the best to hope for is that I may get my strength again and come to find you. But I know that *if* you receive this you will come at once to me.

"They tell me I must write no more, and I want this to go to-day. I shall be happier when it is posted. It is a chance—a hope to live on. My hand shakes, but I can still write that I am your loving sister.

. . . . .

"As soon as I am better I shall start for London to find you. Let Nolly's people in Lincoln's Inn Fields know where you are—and he will go to you at once. He has often asked what has become of you, and I have told him this and that. He believes you still at Rio Grande, or somewhere in S. America."

DATE DUE

GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.

14085

823.91
D39
J77

LAKE ERIE COLLEGE - LINCOLN LIBRARY
CIRC 823.91 D39, J77
De Morgan, Wi Joseph Vance :
3 0356 0004 9425 2

91 De Morgan
Joseph Vance

14085

1 1925 | J. E. Herrick SEP 26 1939
3 1925 | Bender My 1 - '46
928 | Leonne Beard (4w)
mend JUL 18 '54
bindery

m.
St

S0-FKF-609